

KATHERINE  
JOHN



WITHOUT  
TRACE

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To Trevor John



# **WITHOUT TRACE**

**Katherine John**





## Prologue

THE MOTORWAY WAS DESERTED. A tarnished pewter ribbon streaking across countryside drained grey by the indistinct light of a watery moon. The bushes that marked the boundary between road and farmland moved slightly in the chill night breeze then, as headlights shot across the horizon, a figure moved forward, a darker shade amongst the shadows. It waited patiently at the side of the road, its white-gloved hands raised high as if in supplication. The solitary man behind the wheel of the small saloon car braked in response to the gesture, before slowing the car to a halt.

‘I’m sorry to trouble you but my car went off the road about a mile back. Could you possibly give me a lift to the nearest town?’ The voice that drifted in through the open car window was cultured, polite.

‘Of course. Get in.’ The driver made an effort to keep his reply casual, friendly, as though he were frequently flagged down by Pierrots on the motorway at four in the morning. He reached across to the passenger door and unlocked it. ‘Have you been to a fancy dress party?’

‘The costume.’ The Pierrot’s laugh was shallow, artificial. ‘I forgot I was wearing it. My appearance must seem bizarre, to say the least.’ The clown was detached, distant, as though the man or woman behind the mask of black and white grease paint was intoning well-rehearsed, yet scarcely understood, lines.

‘Did you hurt yourself when your car left the road? Hit your head against the steering wheel perhaps?’ The

driver looked the Pierrot over keenly with a professional eye.

‘No, there’s no injury. I am perfectly well, thank you.’ The Pierrot stepped into the car and settled himself in the passenger seat. Even under the inadequate courtesy light, his costume appeared perfect. A consummate work of theatrical art and a very different affair to the rough ensembles hastily thrown together for the hospital balls, the driver observed.

The Pierrot’s black skullcap and loose pyjama suit were of thick dull satin, the front of the hat and the high-necked jacket ornamented by a single row of large white silk pom-poms. The effect was one of expense, yet somehow it also suggested the wealth and luxury of another age. Crepe paper and cheap creased rayon lining would be more today’s standard, even on the stage of the one ailing professional theatre the town could boast. The driver looked up from the costume to the heavily made-up face. Was the Pierrot a Pierrette? The height and build suggested a man, yet the voice was high-pitched, curiously feminine, as though it were an integral part of the disguise.

‘I’m driving to the outskirts of town, will that suit you?’ The driver asked, suddenly remembering why he was travelling on the motorway at such an ungodly hour.

‘Yes. The outskirts will be fine. I’m sorry to put you to all this trouble.’ The clown crossed his arms and slipped his hands into the wide sleeves of his suit like a pantomime Chinese.

The driver turned the ignition key and reached for the gear stick, but the car didn’t move. A flash of cold steel darted upwards from the Pierrot’s hands. The driver stared in disbelief at the blade. He watched, transfixed, as it moved slowly, inexorably towards him. He winced involuntarily as the sharp tip of the knife penetrated the soft skin of his throat just below his left ear. Then

realisation dawned. This was no dream. This was happening. Happening now.

His hands flew upwards in a desperate attempt to wrest the weapon from the Pierrot's hands, but the defence was too weak, too late. Before the driver's fingers touched the knife, they fell limply, landing with a dull thud on the leather-gloved steering wheel.

The Pierrot sat quietly for a moment watching the steady flow of blood pump out of the severed throat on to the dead man's chest. Finally, he withdrew his knife. It came easily. Wiping the blade clean between the gloved fingers of his left hand, he returned it to the sheath concealed beneath his sleeve.

He turned away from the rattling body, opened the car door and stepped on to the gravelled surface of the hard shoulder. Animal-like, he stood poised on tip-toe, his muscles stretched, his face upturned, sniffing the air as though he were searching for an alien scent. All was quiet, peaceful.

He walked around to the driver's side of the car and wrenched open the door. The body slumped sideways on to the road, landing awkwardly on its head. The Pierrot linked his arms around the torso of the dead man and dragged him backwards, pushing the lolling head down on to the blood-soaked chest as though he were a child trying to mend a broken toy.

Panting with exertion, he laboriously heaved his burden off the road into the thick undergrowth of the tangled hedgerow. Soon, his movements were lost among the wind-whispers of the bushes. The moon disappeared behind a bank of cloud. On the eastern horizon a faint, lighter tinge to the sky heralded dawn, and the advent of a new day.

\* \* \*

The light grew stronger, turning to silver, then gold, before the Pierrot emerged from the hedge. He waded stiffly through the overgrown weeds back up the bank to the parked car. His breath jerked spasmodically in quick short gasps, and his hands trembled as they clutched a bundle that he had made from the dead man's jacket. He set his burden gently on the passenger seat of the car, slamming the door shut before walking around the bonnet to the driver's side.

From nearby woods came the first tentative notes of morning birdsong. They mingled with the quiet purr of the engine as the car slid off the hard shoulder on to the empty motorway. Within minutes it was no more than an insignificant speck on the horizon.

The landscape behind remained unchanged except for a darkly wet slick of gore that slided off the road into the undergrowth. The gleam of gold on the eastern horizon intensified, lightening the sky to a translucent shade of opal. Rain began to fall. Slight at first, it became a downpour as the morning progressed. A heavy cleansing rain that washed away the traces of blood and flesh, diluting the red stain to a mark that might have been caused by anything. Cars sped past in the traffic lanes. Intermittent at first, they became a steady trickle that roared into a torrent with the advent of the rush hour.

The travellers who glanced casually out of their car windows didn't wonder at the stain that marred the hard shoulder. But then they were the lucky ones. For their journey's end was not yet in sight.

## Chapter One

THE TELEPHONE RANG SHRILLY, shattering the still atmosphere of the darkened bedroom. A tired hand groped its way out of the tangle of bedcover and duvet and fumbled in the direction of the side table. There was a melodic crash, closely followed by muttered curses.

‘Dr Sherringham?’

‘Which one?’ Daisy mumbled sleepily.

‘Dr Tim Sherringham.’

‘Thank God for that.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘I’ll get him,’ Daisy snapped. It was bad enough to be woken from a deep and blissful sleep without having to cope with a humourless telephone operator. ‘Tim.’ Daisy poked the huddle of bedclothes beside her.

‘No, not tonight. Please not tonight.’ Tim buried his head beneath the pillow. ‘They promised they wouldn’t do it to me. Not tonight.’

Ignoring his protests, Daisy scrabbled beneath the bedclothes until she found his hand. Wrapping his fingers around the receiver she left the bed and stumbled into the bathroom, to the accompaniment of Tim’s muffled pleas.

‘Tell the hospital I’m ill. Dead. Not here. Anything. Daisy. Daisy!’

‘Why oh why do I always do it?’ Daisy asked herself. She was incredibly thirsty, dehydrated from the wine and vodka she had drunk earlier. She filled her tooth glass with water from the cold tap before studying her reflection in the mirror. Her long dark hair was dull, stiff with the setting lotion she only wore on what Tim sardonically

referred to as “state occasions”. It would be hell to brush out in the morning she thought miserably, wondering just how many, or rather few, hours away her morning was.

She stood on tip-toe and peered at her eyes. They were bloodshot, and there were dark smudges underlining her lower lashes that had nothing to do with left-over mascara. She looked as exhausted as she felt. And she was operating at nine sharp. Assisting the hospital dragon – the one female consultant, who devoured housemen like most consultants devoured whisky.

‘Damn!’ She jerked the cord that switched off the bathroom light, and wandered back into the bedroom.

‘I’ll second that.’ Tim was out of bed and pulling on the white evening shirt he had tossed on to the bedroom floor only an hour earlier.

‘If you undid the buttons when you undressed you wouldn’t have to do that.’

‘Do what?’ Tim enquired mechanically.

‘Pull your shirt over your head.’ Daisy looked across at her husband, curiously detached for a moment. They were married. Had been for nearly six months, and still she couldn’t get used to the fact.

What was it Judy had once said about Tim? – he was too good to be true. Good-looking and good natured. Still the clean living all-American boy, even though he hadn’t set foot in the States for nearly twenty years. He even looked like the archetypal movie star hero, six foot six inch frame, slim build, curling dark hair and devastatingly blue eyes...

‘Stop looking at me like that.’

‘Like what?’ Daisy smiled.

‘Like you want to get back into bed.’

‘But I do. I really do.’ She flung herself headlong on the dishevelled duvet.

‘I get the distinct impression you couldn’t give a damn whether I get in with you or not.’

‘I would care,’ Daisy answered. ‘If I wasn’t so very, very tired. Why do I always find your brother’s parties so exhausting?’

‘Because my brother is exhausting.’ Tim ran his fingers through his hair and looked around the room. ‘But exhausting or not, at this time in the morning I have to agree, big brother’s got a point.’

‘What point?’ Daisy enquired sleepily.

‘A point about having to get up in the middle of the night,’ Tim snapped. ‘It’s downright uncivilised. Daisy, where are my pants?’

‘Your trousers,’ she corrected, ‘are where you flung them, on my side of the bed.’

He shook the bedcover and his evening suit fell to the floor.

‘Do you know what Richard said to me tonight?’

‘No.’ Daisy was drifting hazily in that pleasantly comfortable grey world that hovers between waking and sleeping.

‘He said he has only left his bed in the small hours once in the last ten years. And that was the night Joanna’s father had his heart attack...’

Daisy groped her way back to consciousness. ‘He offered you a job again, didn’t he?’

‘He did, and from where I’m standing right now, it looks just the ticket,’ he asserted defiantly.

‘Taking rich men’s blood pressure. Spending each and every day listening to imaginary ills, just because the patient’s wealthy enough to foot the bill in that crassly decorated clinic your brother owns.’

‘It’s not at all like that, you little Marxist.’

‘I know exactly what it’s like,’ she retorted heatedly. ‘Do what you want with your life, but leave me out of it.’

You're not going to turn me into your dogsbody as Richard's done to Joanna. I have no intention of wasting my life hosting parties, and supervising meaningless research for a cosmetic company on the top floor of the clinic. I'm staying right where I am...'

'A houseman for ever?' Tim enquired mildly.

'No, not a houseman for ever!' she exclaimed.

'I love you when you're angry,' he whispered softly, taking the bitterness out of their argument. 'Your eyes blaze so beautifully.' Pressing her back against the pillows he kissed her. 'We'll talk tomorrow.' He glanced at his watch '... Today... oh blast it, another time, when we're not so tired.' He moved away from her.

'If we wait till then we'll never talk.' She smiled despite the anger that still scalded inside her.

'You never know, one day we may both be given the same day off.'

'Is that going to be the same day all geriatric consultants retire and we get promoted?' She knelt on the bed and locked her arms around his neck, pulling him back down next to her. 'Headache gone?' she asked. He nodded. 'Quite gone?'

'Yes.'

'In that case, as we have only just made up, must you go? Right now? Right this minute?'

'Right now, right this minute.' He disentangled himself from her arms. 'Yesterday I pleaded with Bassett. "Put Mrs Hawkins on the theatre list," I begged. "We can do a Caesarean this afternoon. A nice, quiet, calm operation." And what did the great man say? "No. Leave it until Monday." And now I have to get up,' he glanced at his watch, 'at three-forty in the morning after a night on the tiles and go and operate.'

'Are you sure you're in a fit state to drive?' Daisy crawled back under the bedclothes.



‘I didn’t indulge as much as you, darling. Besides, fit state or not, by the sound of it Hawkins junior won’t wait any longer than it’s going to take me to get to the hospital.’ He wrapped the duvet around her relaxing form. ‘Breakfast at eight in the canteen?’

‘You take me to such nice places.’

‘Don’t I just.’ He paused for a second in the open doorway. ‘Love you.’

‘Love you too.’ The temptation to return to sleep was overwhelming. Daisy’s eyelids drooped and she slid sweetly, effortlessly downwards, sensing rather than actually hearing Tim leave the room. Her final thoughts were of doctors and night calls.

Why hadn’t they taken up farming or train driving? No. Train drivers had to work at night too, and so did farmers when their animals were sick. Their lives would be no different. Her mind drifted aimlessly, incoherently, for a few seconds, then there was only a dreamless sleep that obliterated everything. Even Tim’s absence in the bed beside her.

The alarm woke Daisy. It was buzzing angrily on the floor beside the bed. She hadn’t bothered to pick it up after she’d knocked it over during the night. Resisting the fatal temptation to bury herself under the duvet for an extra minute, she sat up, opened her eyes wide and threw back the bedclothes.

Tim’s maroon velvet bow tie lay on her dressing table next to a glittering bundle of her costume jewellery. Why was it too much effort to put things away at night? She stepped over her black taffeta evening dress on the way to the bathroom. Next time she’d find the energy. She really would. The sparkle and glamour of the evening inevitably looked cheap and tawdry in the cold light of morning. Like a hangover it tainted the beginning of the new day.

Turning the shower to tepid she braced her muscles for the sensation of cool water. Her body as well as her mind was still numbed by sleep. If her life could consist only of evenings and nights, the world would be perfect. She'd glide through beautifully quiet private times with Tim. But perhaps even perfection would grow tedious. They'd stir themselves now and again to do the odd afternoon of work. Just one or two a week, preceded by long lazy mornings spent drinking coffee and reading the newspapers. Like Sundays in the old days, before patients, responsibilities and duty rosters had taken whole chunks out of their lives. But dreams were dreams – and reality was this ghastly never-ending effort. Shivering, she switched the shower off and reached for the towel to dry herself.

Twenty minutes after leaving her bed she locked the apartment, took the lift to the ground floor and walked out of the building. Jangling her car keys impatiently, she searched the ranks of parked cars for her Fiat but saw only Tim's Mercedes.

'Blast him!' she cursed crossly. He knew she hated driving his car. Besides, no self-respecting registrar should drive a Mercedes. The very idea was ridiculous. If his brother had to give them a car instead of teaspoons for a wedding present, he should have given them an anonymous little runabout, not this top of the range, gross gleaming status symbol that she loathed driving and was petrified of scratching.

She wrenched open the door and tossed her bag into the back, before climbing into the driving seat. At least there shouldn't be too much traffic on the road at this time in the morning. Another hour and it would be chaos. She jerked the seat forward, smiling at the thought of Tim folding his long body into her Fiat. He invariably forgot to

adjust the seat. The last time he'd done it, he'd twisted his knee.

Consoled by the memory of Tim's discomfort she turned on the ignition and crashed the gears. Muttering to herself she tried again, and succeeded. Slowly, carefully, she inched her way out of the parking bay on to the drive.

Once she reached the motorway Daisy forgot about the car and drove automatically. As Tim so often commented, "the Merc was built for motorways". She sat back in the driving seat and relaxed. She knew it was childish of her to resent Richard for buying them the car. Tim owed his brother a great deal. His education, the apartment that had been a wedding present along with the car, and Richard would have given them a great deal more if Tim hadn't put a stop to it. When it came to money Richard was generous to a fault. But his generosity did nothing to assuage her inferiority complex.

She had struggled into medicine the hard way, via comprehensive school and a comfortable, if shabby, middle-class home. Not even the glamour of the formal annual college balls, had prepared her for Tim's introduction to the Sherringham lifestyle.

First there was Richard's Georgian mansion which Tim still treated as home. She could never bring herself to breeze through its grand double doors and laugh and joke with the butler as Tim did. But she had never managed to shake off her first impression that everything in the Sherringham household, from the luxuriously tasteful I down to the elaborately staged dinner parties, belonged, not in life, but in one of the glossy magazines.

Richard and his wife Joanna existed in a splendid and perfect world that allowed nothing distasteful – nothing obnoxious – nothing real – to intrude. Their daily life would provide the perfect backdrop to a glossy Hollywood

film. But Daisy couldn't help feeling that she would be happier watching from the stalls, an ice-cream and packet of popcorn in hand, rather than moving on to the set as one of the players.

She couldn't even blame her sense of isolation and unreality on Richard and Joanna. Neither of them had ever as much as hinted that she was different from any of the other titled, wealthy and famous people who walked through their mansion's doors. Ignoring her socialist ideals and chain-store clothes, they had welcomed her to the family with open, if slightly chilly, arms. And she had soon realised their lack of warmth was not restricted to her. They kept themselves detached and slightly distant from everyone. Except Tim. No one could be indifferent to Tim. But then Tim was no longer part of Richard's world. He had broken away. Or had he?

Doubts stole from the recesses of her mind. Tim always listened to Richard. Even when he mocked the NHS hospital she and Tim worked in, and brought up the subject of the lack of funds that told in the outdated equipment and long waiting lists; their endless hours of duty; the constant fight against time that meant they had virtually no private life. Each and every caustic observation Richard made terrified her.

The last thing she wanted was to be sucked into the Sherringham whirlpool and transformed into a beautician's ideal of the perfect woman: immaculately styled hair, nails painted with varnish that never had the opportunity to chip, her best features heightened and transformed by layers of expertly applied make-up. Programmed to make the correct response for each and every social occasion; her career subjugated to Tim's. Just as Joanna's as a psychiatrist had been subjugated and curtailed to bolster Richard's ambitions.

“But it’s not the quantity of our private life that’s important, dear brother. It’s the quality.”

Tim’s laughter intruded into her thoughts. He’d said that the first time she’d heard Richard try to pressurise him into working at the Holbourne and Sherringham Clinic. But then Tim hadn’t said it last night. Or if he had, she hadn’t been around to hear him.

‘Damn Joanna and her parties,’ she muttered feelingly. Her sister-in-law must be getting to her. She could have sworn she could smell her astringent perfume.

Jerking herself sharply back into the present, she blew her horn when a red Porsche cut dangerously close in front of her.

‘Idiot,’ she mouthed at the driver. Give a middle-aged man a sports car and he had to live up to the image, even if it meant killing himself and everyone else on the road.

Her anger died with her brief flare of temper. When she was with Tim, she was sure of him, his love for her, the life they had chosen to lead. She was a fool to allow one of Richard and Joanna’s meaningless parties to upset her. She had to bury her doubts. Be positive. Count the pluses in her life with Tim, not worry about the minuses that might, or might not, be lurking around the corner. Besides, what could she do if Tim did change his mind about taking the directorship in the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic that Richard had offered him?

She focused on the last weekend she and Tim had shared. Had it been a month, or two months, ago? They had taken their boat down the coast and anchored in a deserted cove for a couple of days – and nights. There had been no telephones, no beepers, no Richard. Nothing except what they themselves had made of the brief holiday. Tim was right; it was not the quantity of time they spent together. It was the quality.

She took the slip road off the motorway, drove to the hospital and left the Mercedes in one of the wide bays marked REGISTRARS ONLY. Tim may have driven her Fiat to work, but he could take the status symbol home. She lifted her bag off the back seat, locked the car door and breezed through the main entrance towards the lifts.

‘Nice morning, Dr Sherringham.’

‘Beautiful, John,’ she smiled at the porter, pressed the lift button and wondered if Tim was waiting for her. Hospital nights had a nasty habit of extending into days, particularly on the maternity ward.

‘Lazy people take lifts, active, health-conscious ones take the stairs.’

‘You can be healthy enough for both of us this morning, Judy.’ Daisy yawned as she walked into the lift.

‘I never said I was one of the active breed.’ Judy joined her. ‘Merely commenting on their ways. Are you going to the canteen?’

‘I am.’

‘You look terrible,’ Judy said cheerfully. She pushed the button for the tenth floor. ‘Was the surgeons’ barbecue that wild?’

‘Not the barbecue, Tim’s brother’s dinner party.’

‘The eminent Dr Sherringham as opposed to the two plebeian ones.’

Daisy braced herself for the shudder that all the hospital lifts gave when they reached their floor. ‘Where are you this morning?’

‘Antenatal clinic.’ Judy stepped out of the lift and pushed the canteen door open. ‘You?’

‘Theatre.’

‘Not with...’

‘Her Mightiness,’ Daisy pre-empted grimly, picking a none too clean tray from the stand. She looked around the room. The place was half empty, and there was no sign of Tim. ‘Can I buy you a coffee?’ she asked Judy.

‘You could, but I’d prefer orange juice. That at least is covered by the Trade Descriptions Act. Where’s Tim? He should be here soothing your fevered brow with the day you have looming.’

‘He had an emergency call last night, the Hawkins baby.’

‘Poor Tim. Was it a very early call?’ Judy commiserated.

‘Fourish, but when you’ve only been in bed an hour it seems earlier.’

‘Don’t I know it.’ Judy picked up two plates of toast from the warming tray. ‘Can I tempt you?’

‘Errghh.’

‘I take it that means “no thank you dear friend”?’ Judy grabbed Daisy’s arm. ‘Watch out. Here comes pain personified.’

Daisy snatched her coffee and marched briskly to a table at the far end of the canteen.

Judy followed at a smart pace. ‘He’s heading this way.’

‘Isn’t he always,’ Daisy muttered through clenched teeth. ‘The man’s in love with you.’

‘Or you,’ Judy countered.

‘Can’t be me, I’m a married lady.’

‘Since when has a little thing like Tim stopped a first class menace like Eric Hedley from pestering a woman?’

A shadow fell over their table. ‘Can I join you, girls?’

‘We’re not girls, we’re doctors,’ Judy said flatly. ‘And since you’re already half-way into that chair, your question is superfluous.’

‘Where’s the blue-eyed boy this morning?’ Eric enquired snidely.

‘Whose blue-eyed boy?’ Daisy demanded, knowing perfectly well that Eric was referring to Tim.

‘Whose blue-eyed boy do you think? Tim, of course, every consultant’s dream registrar.’

‘Jealousy doesn’t become you, Eric,’ Judy purred sarcastically. ‘We all know how you angled for Tim’s post, but fortunately for humankind the best man was appointed.’

‘I wouldn’t be too sure of that if I were you,’ Eric retorted swiftly. ‘I’ve just left the labour ward. Mrs Hawkins’s waters broke at seven-thirty this morning, and already the baby’s distressed.’

Daisy stared at Eric blankly. ‘But Tim’s...’

‘Tim’s nowhere to be found,’ Eric interrupted. ‘They’ve been paging him for –’ he looked pointedly at his watch. ‘Thirty-five minutes, and although our esteemed registrar is on call, he’s not responding.’

‘That’s ridiculous,’ Daisy protested. ‘Tim left the apartment early this morning.’

Eric raised a querying eyebrow. ‘Well, wherever he is, it’s not here. I’ve been on call all night. Six emergencies and no help. They’re calling Bassett out now, and, if I was a consultant, I wouldn’t be the least bit pleased to be dragged out of bed this early in the morning on clinic day just because my registrar was too bloody idle to respond to an emergency call.’

‘Then it’s just as well you’ll never be a consultant,’ Judy snapped protectively.

‘Tim left before four this morning,’ Daisy asserted forcefully. ‘He should have reached here around four-thirty.’

‘That’s very clever of him, considering he wasn’t even called out until seven-thirty,’ Eric sneered. ‘Let me



guess,’ he looked Daisy in the eye. ‘Can our golden boy possibly be cheating on his wife? But whether he is or he isn’t, I’m sure there’s nothing amiss that big brother can’t solve. What it is to have the power of the medical mafia behind you.’

A complacent expression of smug self-satisfaction spread across Eric’s plump, spotty face. He reminded Daisy of a gross, over-fed, neutered cat. She reached for her coffee cup. Holding it by the handle she tossed the contents full into Eric’s face. He screamed, but Daisy didn’t wait to find out whether the noise was born of pain or shock. She pushed her chair back. It crashed to the floor. Oblivious to the disturbance she’d created, she ran headlong out of the canteen.

‘If that was anything other than hospital coffee, you’d be on your way to the burns unit,’ Judy quipped before chasing after Daisy. She caught up with her on the staircase. ‘Where are you going?’ she asked.

‘Maternity.’ Daisy didn’t break step.

Judy laid a restraining hand on her arm. ‘If Tim’s really in trouble he’s not going to want you around to see it.’

‘If Tim’s there and able to handle whatever’s happening he won’t even know I’m close. But if he needs me...’

‘I’ll go with you.’ Judy quickened her pace.

‘No...’ Daisy turned towards her.

‘Go on, will you,’ Judy ordered, ‘or we’ll both be late for our shifts.’

‘No, Dr Sherringham, Dr Tim Sherringham hasn’t been here today. No, we didn’t call him out before seven-thirty. No, there was no answer from your home number, – I appreciate there must be a mistake, but I have a ward to

run. If you'll excuse me.' The sister turned to her drugs trolley.

'The Hawkins baby?' Daisy asked the sister's back.

'The foetus is no longer viable.'

Calm, reasoned words of logic articulated in the standard bedside manner. But Daisy wasn't in the mood for calm reasoned logic. She clenched her fists impotently, straining them against the pockets of her white coat.

'Is there anything else?' The sister turned and asked pointedly.

'No. Nothing. Thank you.' Daisy stepped aside, allowing the sister to rattle her trolley down the corridor.

'I heard Tim ask for Mrs Hawkins to be put on the theatre list yesterday,' Judy said sharply. 'No one can blame him for this.'

'The baby's still dead,' Daisy said dully.

'And we're doctors. We take the losses along with the gains. Wasn't that what they taught us in medical school?' Judy reminded her. 'There's nothing we can do here, and it's half eight already.' She steered Daisy towards the main corridor. 'If you don't get to the theatre and scrub up right now there's going to be two Dr Sherringtons on the carpet.'

'Something must have happened to Tim. He'd never ignore a call.' Daisy scanned the corridor feverishly. 'He could be hurt or...'

'Go to theatre. I'll organise a search of the hospital. The minute he turns up I'll get word to you.'

'Promise?' Daisy turned her dark, anguished eyes to Judy.

'I promise.' Judy caught Daisy's hand and pressed her fingers reassuringly. 'He's probably picked up on another call. You know Tim. Doctor first, husband second. I thought you knew that when you married him.'

‘You really think that’s what’s happened?’ Daisy clutched at the hope Judy offered.

‘I’m certain,’ Judy assured her.

‘And you’ll get word to me as soon as you know where he is?’

‘I will. Now go before the fireworks start.’

Miss Palmer-Smith was on form. By nine-fifteen Daisy felt as though she, and the other housemen, were personally responsible for every deficiency in the theatre and the hospital. Routine hernia followed routine appendectomy with her either mishearing, or misinterpreting, every command and question Miss Palmer-Smith tossed her way. It didn’t make things any easier when a chance remark reminded her that Miss Palmer-Smith was a personal friend of Richard’s.

Minutes before the final patient on the morning’s list was due to be wheeled in, Alan Cummins, Tim’s counterpart in paediatrics, peered through the porthole. He stayed just long enough to catch Daisy’s attention and mouth, ‘Tim’s in the hospital,’ before disappearing. Daisy had felt incompetent before Alan’s arrival, now she felt positively idiotic. She dropped an instrument, backed into a nurse, and caught her hip awkwardly on a trolley in the space of less than five minutes.

‘Are there any emergencies at the end of this list?’ The consultant watched Daisy begin to tie the final stitches.

‘No, Miss Palmer-Smith,’ Daisy murmured from behind her mask.

‘Perhaps it’s just as well, Dr Sherringham,’ the consultant observed dryly. She snapped off her gloves. ‘Finish up here.’

‘Yes, Miss Palmer-Smith. Thank you,’ Daisy replied automatically, not knowing why she was being thankful. Gratitude for the end of the morning perhaps?

Miss Palmer-Smith swept out of the theatre and Daisy forced herself to concentrate on the patient on the table. A few minutes more and she’d see Tim. What on earth had happened to make him behave so stupidly? Had there been a crash on the motorway? Had Tim stayed with the injured driver?

If that was the case, why hadn’t she seen him on the way in? This was the only General Hospital for miles, so why hadn’t he booked in here? Unless he had taken whoever it was to Richard’s clinic. Of course – the clinic. It was closer to town...

‘How long do you want before I start bringing her round?’ The anaesthetist asked. Daisy glanced at Mike Edmunds. His slight figure was half hidden by the array of tubes and bottles surrounding the patient’s head.

‘One minute more and I’ll be through.’ The tension had lifted. Miss Palmer-Smith was a first-class surgeon, but the atmosphere she generated was anything but conducive to work. Daisy knotted the final threads into the patient’s abdomen.

‘Very neat,’ Mike complimented. ‘Do you darn Tim’s socks as well?’

‘Sometimes,’ Daisy replied absent-mindedly.

‘By the way, I’m sorry about Tim’s trouble. If there’s anything I can do...’

‘Thank you.’ Touched by the sincerity in Mike’s voice, Daisy weakened in relief. Soon, very soon, she’d be with Tim. Would he be waiting for her in the surgeons’ changing room? She cut the final cord with a flourish.

‘I’ll stay in post-op,’ Mike tilted the patient’s head back. ‘Go and get yourself a coffee.’

‘Thanks. I’ll remember you for this.’

‘I expect you to,’ he called after her.

## Chapter Two

TO DAISY'S DISMAY, ALAN, not Tim, was waiting for her in the surgeons' changing room.

'You said you'd seen Tim,' she began urgently.

'No one can find him,' Alan admitted sheepishly. 'His car's in the car park...'

'The Mercedes parked in the registrars' bay?' she interrupted.

'Don't tell me – you put it there?'

'Tim took the Fiat last night.' Daisy stripped the rubber gloves from her hands and threw them into the bin.

'I'll check the car park one last time.' Alan walked to the door. 'If he doesn't turn up soon, Bassett's going to have his head on a plate.'

'Alan?'

He turned and faced her. He was of middle height, plump, with fair freckled skin, and vivid ginger hair. He had been the life and soul of every hospital party she had attended and was universally liked for his self-deprecating sense of humour. But for the first time since she'd known him, Daisy couldn't even see a glimmer of a smile on his face.

'What do you think has happened to Tim?'

'I can't imagine,' Alan replied with more honesty than tact. 'He's always so reliable you can set your watch by his movements.'

Daisy stared at her locker. She didn't want him to see just how close she was to breaking point.

Alan wrapped his arm awkwardly around Daisy's shoulders, and pulled her head down on to his chest. 'Stop

worrying. I'm sure that when he turns up he'll have a perfectly reasonable explanation.'

'Such as?'

'He could have had an accident – driven off the road –'

'Someone would have found him by now, if he had. Besides, all the motorway casualties are brought here –'

'I've checked casualty six times this morning,' he confessed. 'Daisy what do you want to do?'

'Look for him.' She opened her locker and pulled out a skirt and blouse. 'He left the flat before four and it's...' she checked the clock that hung above the door. 'It's twelve-thirty. It's been eight hours.'

'You know how easy it is to forget the time, especially if you're working. Tim could be caught up in an emergency of some kind.' He knew she didn't believe him. He didn't even believe himself. 'When you've changed, telephone his mobile and home. He may have gone back there if he had a bump in the car.'

'And if he doesn't answer?'

'I'll drive you and Judy to the flat. We'll look for him on the way, and what's the betting he passes us. And then we'll feel complete fools for worrying about him.' Alan smiled at her. 'Come on, we've things to do. I'll find Judy; we'll meet in the car park.'

Daisy stripped off her gown and dressed in record time. Staff weren't supposed to leave the hospital during meal breaks, but she didn't want to ask Alan if he'd cleared their absence with administration in case he had and they'd refused. It was a half hour drive to the apartment, and a half hour back. And they had a bare three-quarters of an hour for lunch. But then the drive might not take them that long. If Alan was right, they would see Tim on the way – that's if he didn't answer her call.

She left the hospital and dialled Tim's mobile on hers the moment she was clear of the building. His answer phone clicked in on the third ring, just as it had done earlier. She dialled the apartment. The telephone rang hollowly in her ear until the same thing happened. If Tim was there he wasn't answering.

Shrugging her white hospital jacket over her shoulders she walked to the car park. Alan was waiting for her, a small furrow of concern marking a narrow line between his bushy eyebrows.

'You phoned.'

'Yes.'

'If we're going to be back for afternoon clinic we have to get moving.'

'Let's take the Mercedes,' Daisy suggested. 'If Tim sees it, he'll stop.'

'Good thinking.'

She threw the keys at Alan. 'You drive.'

'I'm not driving Tim's Merc,' he protested.

'I want to look out for Tim, and I can't do that and drive. Is Judy coming?'

'We're picking her up at the main entrance.' Alan climbed reluctantly into the driving seat of Tim's car.

'You look left, I'll look right, and Alan you keep your eyes on the road,' Judy ordered when she jumped into the back of the car.

The journey was a strain with the jokes between Judy and Alan growing thinner and more forced as they drew closer to the apartment. It was a relief all round when Alan finally turned into the driveway of the six storey mock-Georgian block.

Daisy opened the passenger door before Alan stopped the car. Shivering, despite the warmth of the spring sunshine that had followed the morning's rain, she stepped



out into the fresh air. She didn't look along the ranks of parked cars for the Fiat. If it was there – she'd find out soon enough. If it wasn't – so what? Its absence meant nothing. Tim could have broken down – crashed. Already she found herself clinging to 'ifs' and 'maybes'.

'Wait.' Judy called after her. 'We'll come with you. Judy ran after Daisy, leaving Alan to park the car.

'You're back early, Dr Sherringham,' the porter looked up from the newspaper spread out on his desk in the entrance hall. 'No one sick today?'

'We're looking for Tim, Fred,' she answered. 'Have you seen him?'

'Not this morning.' The old man whipped off his commissionaire's cap and scratched his bald head. 'But I'm not always at my desk. Between putting out the rubbish and seeing to the post...'

'Thanks, Fred,' Daisy cut him short. She knew that he wasn't always at his desk. Tim could have come in and gone upstairs without him noticing. The list of 'maybes' was growing. Tim had to be in the flat. Daisy concentrated all her energy on an image of her husband. He had to be there. He simply had to.

Judy rang for the lift. The doors clanged open as Alan joined them. He pressed the button for the third floor. Daisy thrust her hands deep into her pockets. She was still shivering, but, if the others noticed, they were tactful enough not to comment.

'You've got my keys,' Daisy reminded Alan when they reached the apartment door. He found the right one and inserted it in the lock. The door swung open. Unable to stand the suspense a moment longer, Daisy crashed the door back on its hinges and ran into the hall. All the doors that led out of it were closed. She laid her hand on the brass handle of the door that led into the living room, jerked it down and stumbled inside.

The room yawned vacantly back at her. Her velvet evening wrap lay on the leather sofa where she had left it the night before. Tim's shoes stood in the middle of the oak floor, his raincoat was still on the coffee table. She went to the glass doors that opened on to the balcony. The rattan furniture stood still damp from the morning's rain.

She charged through the connecting doors that led into the dining room. The high-backed, leather-upholstered chairs stood grouped around the antique Spanish dining table. On the longest wall spindly-legged pink shells sat, in formal jury trial pose in a rock pool. Tim's first and only surrealistic attempt at oil painting. She went through the kitchen into the inner hall that led to the two bedrooms and bathrooms. Everything was as she had left it that morning. Her taffeta dress lay across the unmade bed. Tim's wardrobe door stood open, their towels hung limply on the bathroom rail.

'He's not in the spare bedroom or the study.' Judy looked anxiously into the master bedroom. 'Do you think he's been back since this morning?'

Daisy shook her head. Anything – almost anything – she qualified, would have been better than this cold emptiness.

'Well, he hasn't been back here and he didn't reach the hospital.' Alan said briskly. 'That narrows the field. The car must have broken down somewhere between here and the hospital.'

'For nine hours?' Daisy said flatly.

'If his car went off the road, he could be concussed and still sitting in it.' Alan, the professional no-nonsense, medical man had taken over from the friend. 'There's nothing here, so shall we go and look?'

Daisy followed Alan and Judy out of the apartment. Disturbing thoughts whirled through her mind at break-neck speed. What if the empty apartment was all she was

going to be left with? What if she never saw Tim again? The crooked, knowing smile he always gave her whenever they glimpsed one another unexpectedly in the hospital corridors?

‘We’ll find him, Daisy. I promise you we’ll find him.’ A note of hysteria crept into Judy’s voice and Daisy knew that she too had been unnerved by the empty apartment.

Alan drove slowly down the inside lane of the motorway.

‘Look left,’ Judy commanded. ‘There’s a ditch next to the hard shoulder. The Fiat could have veered into it.’

Daisy looked. Cars hurtled past at break-neck speed, horns blaring, lights flashing, and once a group of teenagers drew alongside shouting insults through their open windows.

‘I never realised how monotonous this landscape was.’ Judy shifted uncomfortably in her seat. ‘Trees, hedgerows, fields. Trees – hedgerows – fields –’

‘What’s that?’ Daisy screamed, her nerves stretched to breaking point.

Alan screeched the car to a halt on the hard shoulder. ‘What?’

‘That bundle over there. There’s blood on it,’ Daisy whispered.

Judy groped blindly for Daisy’s hand.

‘You two stay here.’ Alan left the car. Slamming the door with unnecessary vigour, he walked to the edge of the hard shoulder. Daisy watched numbly as he crouched low for a moment. He rose, straightened himself to his full height and kicked whatever it was down the embankment.

‘Dead fox,’ he muttered when he returned to the driving seat. ‘Tim’s going to laugh himself silly when he hears about this.’

‘I hope so,’ Daisy breathed fervently. ‘I really hope so.’

Alan parked the Mercedes in the registrars' bay minutes before the two o'clock clinics were due to start. 'See you in the canteen at five?' he suggested.

'Good idea,' Judy agreed.

'And whoever hears from Tim first gets a message to the other two?' Alan's plea fell on deaf ears. Judy was already running towards out-patients, and Daisy, oblivious to the world, was searching through the rows of parked cars, looking for a small blue Fiat that wasn't there.

'Coffee after work,' Alan repeated, pressing the car keys into her hand.

'Yes, please.'

'I'll check casualty...'

'I'd rather do it myself.'

He nodded.

She turned and walked slowly towards the hospital buildings. There was something in the determined set of her shoulders and the curve of her neck that tore at his heartstrings.

'Blast Tim for giving her such a scare,' he thought irritably as he walked across the lawns to the children's annex.

The man was thin, scruffy, with badly cut long dark hair. Hardly an obvious police officer. He pulled a notebook and pencil from his pocket.

'And what time was it when Dr Tim Sherringham left?'

'Just before four in the morning,' Daisy answered tersely. It was warm in Alan's office, and there were too many people in a small space. Two police sergeants, the chief surgeon, Mr Bassett, who was already looking apologetic for his earlier outburst(?), Judy who simply wouldn't be put outside, and Alan and herself.

At six o'clock, after she and Alan had made a second fruitless visit to the apartment, Alan had called the police. It was the only thing left to do. The AA had received no accident reports that day for the stretch of motorway between the apartment and the hospital. Tim hadn't been admitted to their casualty department, or any other within a fifty mile radius. And no one had heard from him in fourteen hours.

Alan had spent most of his afternoon tea break trying to persuade Daisy to call the police, but she had refused, hoping that even at that late hour Tim would walk into the canteen with an apology and a plausible explanation.

'I'm sorry, darling. I fell asleep behind the wheel of the car, went off the road, and didn't come round until a half hour ago.'

She'd reach out and touch him – stroke the side of his face – only Tim hadn't returned. Instead, she and Alan had waited until the last possible moment before returning to their respective clinics.

She'd taken ten minutes out at five o'clock to telephone the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic. Gritting her teeth, she'd forced herself to be polite to one of the talking beautician's heads Richard employed to run the reception desk.

'It's Dr Daisy Sherringham,' she'd cut into the ritual 'Good-day. Holbourne and Sherringham clinic. Can I help you?'

'Yes. Dr Sherringham.' There had been an edge to the carefully modulated tone that told her the dislike wasn't one-sided.

'Could I speak to Dr Richard Sherringham please?'

'Dr Sherringham left for a lecture tour this morning. He's in New York tonight and...'

'I'd forgotten. How stupid of me.' Tim's disappearance had put everything else out of her mind.

She'd only succeeded in giving the idiotic girl a chance to crow over her ignorance of family matters. Gripping the receiver tightly, she'd steeled herself to ask one more question.

'Has Dr Tim Sherringham been in the clinic today?'

'No, Dr Sherringham. Should we have expected him?'

'No. Sorry to have troubled you.' Daisy had switched off her mobile, and considered the rumours the receptionist would spread in selected areas of the medical society in the town.

"What do you think? Tim Sherringham and his wife don't even communicate with one another. She even telephoned me to ask if I'd seen him."

She switched on her phone once more. Where Tim was concerned she had no pride, no pride at all.

Her call had been answered almost immediately.

'The Sherringham residence.'

'Hello Hare. It's Daisy.'

'Good evening, Dr Daisy.'

'Is Joanna in?'

'Her ladyship flew out to her father's Italian villa this morning, Dr Daisy.'

'Of course, Hare, she mentioned it last night. How silly of me.' Hot, hopeless tears had welled behind her eyes. 'Has Tim been at the house today?'

'Not today, Dr Daisy. We haven't seen him since last night, or should I say this morning, when you left.'

'Thank you, Hare. Sorry to trouble you. Goodbye.'

The last 'ifs' and 'maybes' had been torn out from under her. She wanted to crawl into a corner of outpatients and hide until Tim found her and lifted her into his strong arms, a smile crinkling the corners of his deep blue eyes.

She hadn't hidden. She'd returned to her clinic, seen her patients, updated their records and waited until Alan had come looking for her. He'd driven her to the

apartment, then, when they hadn't found Tim she'd asked him to do what he'd been pleading with her to do all afternoon. Call the police.

'You couldn't be more specific about time could you Dr Sherringham?' The sergeant gave her a friendly smile. She had a vague recollection of seeing him somewhere before. Somewhere where he hadn't been a policeman. A patient perhaps?

'Tim mentioned the time when he was dressing,' she murmured, desperately trying to piece together the events of the previous night. The problem was last night had been one of many nights. She and Tim were always getting called out in the early hours. 'We'd been to a party,' she apologised. 'I was very tired.'

'Whose party was it Dr Sherringham?' The question came from the second sergeant, the one who'd introduced himself as Collins – Peter Collins. Daisy had already marked him down as a cold bastard. He was as polite as the first sergeant, but his brown eyes were frosty, appraising, with no hint of inner warmth.

'It was a Bon-Voyage party for Tim's brother,' she replied, 'Richard Sherringham...'

'Dr Richard Sherringham who runs the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic?'

She nodded, angry that she should go up in anyone's estimation, especially this sergeant's, because of Richard's influence.

'What time did you get back from the party?' The first policeman, whom Alan had called Trevor, enquired gently.

'About two. We talked for a while then we went to bed around two-thirty.'

'And the call came?' Peter Collins took control again.

She closed her eyes tightly; visualized Tim standing at the foot of the bed pulling on his trousers, his evening shirt

hanging loose on his tall, slim frame. "I wouldn't have to get up at..." he'd said as he looked at his watch. "... three-forty in the morning."

'Three-forty,' she said flatly.

'Three-forty,' he repeated. 'You're sure of that?'

'I'm sure.' Daisy opened her eyes and looked at Trevor. There was concern, and perhaps even a little sympathy, mirrored in his eyes.

'Could you tell us what your husband was wearing when he left?' Peter Collins was authoritative, logical, just like the sister who'd told her that the Hawkins foetus was no longer viable. She wondered why the system bled emotions out of some people, while leaving others intact.

'White silk evening shirt. Black trousers. No tie. It's still in our bedroom.'

'Coat?' Collins's pencil was poised over his notebook.

'He may have worn his overcoat,' she stumbled over her words, trying to sound as matter-of-fact as the sergeant, all the while hating this minute, dry-blooded dissection of her private life with Tim. 'He left his raincoat in the living room.'

'We have a description of your husband, and the make, model and number of the car he was driving. With luck we should have something quite soon, Dr Sherringham.' Trevor left his chair.

'Just a minute,' Peter Collins flicked back the pages of his notebook. 'I'm not quite sure of one or two points. Bit slow on the uptake, Mrs Sherringham,' he apologised, without a trace of regret.

'Dr Sherringham,' Alan corrected.

Sergeant Collins looked hard at Alan. 'I'd like to run through the facts one more time.'

'If you really think it will help.' Mr Bassett didn't bother to conceal his boredom with the proceedings.



Seemingly oblivious to Bassett's annoyance, Sergeant Collins sat back in his chair.

'Now let me see,' he began in an irritatingly slow voice, 'it's three-forty in the morning and the telephone rings in your apartment, *Doctor Sherringham*,' he looked to Daisy for confirmation.

'It was a little before that,' she snapped, concern making her terse. 'Tim mentioned the time when he was dressing. He was up by then.'

'You answered the telephone?'

'It was next to my side of the bed.'

'Presumably you spoke to whoever was at the other end.'

'Isn't it usual to speak to whoever rings you?' Her voice was brittle with sarcasm.

'Did you speak to a man or a woman?' he continued blandly.

'A man – I think,' she added, her certainty wavering.

'Think again, Dr Sherringham,' Collins's tone hardened.

'It was a man,' she asserted. 'Definitely a man. All the night telephonists here are men.'

'But the telephone call didn't come from here,' Sergeant Collins said. 'Surely you must have realised that by now.'

'Of course it was a hospital telephonist. I took the call...'

'And I checked with the switchboard, Dr Sherringham. You say your husband responded to a call that came in sometime around three-forty. But the hospital records are quite specific. He wasn't called out until seven-thirty.'

*Seven thirty!* Eric Hedley grinning up at her in the canteen. "Seven thirty."

'Then it's true.'

‘What’s true, Dr Sherringham?’ Collins enquired sharply.

‘Eric – Eric Hedley, he’s a houseman here.’ Her voice rasped as she struggled to breathe. ‘He told me this morning that Tim hadn’t been called out until seven-thirty.’

‘And you didn’t believe him?’ Collins looked her in the eye.

‘How could I? When I knew otherwise.’

‘You really believe that the hospital called your husband out in the early hours of the morning.’

‘I’m certain of it,’ she reiterated forcefully. ‘I took the call myself. Tim mentioned the Hawkins case...’

‘There’s no record...’

‘To hell with the record,’ she screamed. ‘To hell with it...’

‘Daisy, Tim’s going to be all right.’ Alan moved to the arm of her chair and cradled her gently. She buried her face in his hairy tweed jacket, closed her eyes and allowed her tears to fall unchecked.

‘Dr Sherringham has put up with more than enough for one day, Sergeant Collins,’ Judy said reproachfully.

‘It’s our job to establish the facts, Miss...’

‘Dr Osbourne, Judy Osbourne. And it is possible to establish facts in a civilised manner. Doctors do it all the time,’ she said humourlessly.

‘I think we’ve enough information to be getting on with. If Dr Tim Sherringham contacts any of you, you will let us know?’

‘Of course, Sergeant,’ Bassett replied.

‘Ask them to put you through to either Sergeant Trevor Joseph, or myself, Sergeant Peter Collins.’ Collins was nonplussed by the effect his questioning had had on Daisy.

‘Or you could always call Alan,’ Trevor suggested. ‘He’s never failed to get hold of me yet if he wants anything.’

‘Thanks for coming personally, Trevor. I appreciate it.’ Alan shook his hand.

‘Any time,’ Trevor replied.

‘Have you any thoughts on what may have happened to Dr Sherringham?’ Bassett looked at the officers as though he expected them to conjure Tim out of the air.

‘We deal with missing persons every day, sir,’ Collins said flatly. ‘People disappear for all sorts of reasons. Life suddenly gets on top of them, too much responsibility too soon.’ He shrugged his shoulders.

‘Believe me that theory doesn’t apply to Tim Sherringham,’ Alan interrupted.

‘I wasn’t referring to this particular case,’ Collins continued in a bored tone. ‘Everyone here is acquainted with Dr Sherringham, and as such your theories about his sudden disappearance will be far more valid than mine. All I’m saying is that every day people walk out of apparently full and happy lives, and never return. The Salvation Army have tens of thousands of such cases on their books.’

‘Teenage runaways,’ Judy said. ‘Tim Sherringham can hardly be classed as one of those.’

‘Not everyone who vanishes is a teenager, Dr Osbourne. The Salvation Army will tell you that youngsters make up only a small percentage of the missing persons on their lists. The lure of the bright lights and greener grass is there for everyone. Grown men meet grown women, have affairs, and on occasion find it simpler to walk out of one life and start another without waiting around long enough to make excuses.’

‘Tim isn’t having an affair.’ Daisy lifted her tear-stained face and stared defiantly at Peter Collins.

'I'd be the last person to tell you he was,' the sergeant said patronisingly. 'What I am saying, to all of you, is that family, friends and colleagues frequently come hot-foot to the police with a story about a missing person, all of them fearing the worst, when often there's a perfectly obvious, logical explanation for the disappearance if only they'd look for it.'

'Dr Sherringham.' Trevor Joseph offered Daisy his hand. 'I promise you we'll do everything we can to find your husband. Please, try not to worry.'

'Thank you.' Daisy was grateful to him for silencing Peter Collins, but although she wanted to – she couldn't believe he'd find Tim soon.

'Do you have a recent photograph of your husband?' he asked.

'At home, in our apartment.'

'Would you mind if I dropped by and picked one up? I'll ring first.'

'There's no need, I'll be home all evening. Now there's nowhere left to look I'll be waiting for news, Sergeant.'

The room emptied. The police and Mr Bassett left. Alan walked with them as far as the main entrance. He returned to find Judy sitting on the floor in front of Daisy, holding her hand.

'What do you two say to picking up a bottle and a take-away and going over to my place for dinner?' He suggested, forcing enthusiasm.

'Carol would have a fit, and quite rightly so at this short notice,' Judy countered. 'Daisy and I are going up to my place for dinner.'

'Thanks, but no thanks to both ideas.' Daisy failed to control the tremor in her voice. 'As I said to the sergeant, I'm going home.' She looked from Alan to Judy. 'If Tim's going anywhere, he's going home, and I want to be there

when he walks in.’ She fumbled for her bag and left her chair, but the question hung unspoken in the air. “What if he doesn’t come home?”

Judy braved the silence. ‘I’ll go with you. Any variation on the theme I had planned for this evening would be welcome.’

‘Please don’t take this the wrong way,’ Daisy said, ‘but I’d rather be alone. I have to clean the apartment and get some sleep. I’m on duty this weekend.’

‘Are you sure you’ll be all right?’ Alan eyed her with an expression she knew only too well. It was one all doctors used on their patients. Only she wasn’t a patient. Not yet.

‘If I feel the need to be with someone, you’ll be the first I’ll call. I promise.’

‘You won’t have to call very loud for me,’ Judy joined her at the door. ‘I’ll be in your guest room.’

‘Judy...’

‘I won’t take no for an answer. I’m sick of hospital flats, and after this morning’s reminder of how the other half live, you simply won’t keep me away. I’d love a bath in your guest bathroom.’ Judy picked up her bag and walked to the door. ‘First stop, my hovel to grab my toothbrush, then it’s your place. After you, Dr Sherringham.’

## Chapter Three

DAISY CRAWLED THE MERCEDES along the road home. Judy reminded her that they'd been over the road twice already that day, but Daisy couldn't bring herself to pick up speed. She glanced sideways out of the car window every few moments, searching for something – anything. But there was nothing.

She parked the car and walked up to the apartment, Judy at her side, hope tugging at her nerve endings. Perhaps Tim had called? Left a message on her voicemail? Perhaps he'd come back to change his clothes...

But the same bleak emptiness greeted her when she walked through their front door. Nothing...

Judy moved tactfully into the spare bedroom, announcing that she was going to take the long, hot bath she'd promised herself. Left to her own devices, Daisy set about clearing the flat. She carried the clothes that littered the living room into their bedroom and hung them away in their wardrobes. Then she made the bed, picking her own and Tim's clothes off the floor. His blue towelling bathrobe lay in a heap behind the bedroom door.

She grasped it as if it were a lifeline. Holding it close, she sat on the bed. The smell of his cologne was embedded in the soft fibres. Exhausted, she fingered the broken loop of material that prevented Tim from hanging it up properly. She should have sewn it weeks ago – like a flood-tide bursting through dam gates, the emotions she'd barely kept in check throughout the day crashed to the surface. She threw herself on to their bed and sobbed, her fingers wrapped tightly around the sleeves of the robe.

Where was he? Why had he gone? Last night had been no different to any other night. He loved her. His last words had been "Love you." Surely you *knew*, had some sort of warning, before your world turned upside down.

Peter Collins's words echoed through her mind.

"Grown men meet grown women, have affairs, and on occasion find it simpler to walk out of one life and start another without waiting around long enough to make excuses."

Could that have happened to Tim? Could he have met someone else without her knowing, or even sensing that he'd fallen out of love with her?

"If we don't eat, we could go to bed for a couple of hours." Tim's face, suggestive, smiling, had looked round their bedroom door as soon as she had walked in yesterday evening.

"You'll be hungry," she'd warned, warming to the idea.

"Not in the way it counts. Here woman."

She'd thrown her coat to the floor and run to him laughing. His black hair, wet from the shower, had been plastered to his forehead, and his skin had been damp, smelling of soap. He never could wait long enough to dry himself properly.

"We'll eat at Richard's," he'd said much later, pulling her naked body along the length of his.

"Pate de foie gras, snail's caviar, and peanuts?" she'd prophesied, snuggling close to him under the duvet.

"Not on your life. We'll raid the fridge. There's bound to be some real food in the house. Richard still eats people food, and we Sherringtons are a hungry lot."

"Don't I know it?"

She could still hear his laughter. He'd loved her at that moment, she was sure of it. And that moment was their life together. Tim could never lie, never conceal his feelings. Richard was the cool one who calculated the value of every smile, every friendship he made. Richard could always be trusted to show polite interest, no matter what his personal opinion...

'Daisy? Are you all right?' Judy's knock broke into her reverie.

'Fine,' Daisy choked on the word.

'There's a police officer here to see you. Trevor Joseph, the one Alan knows.'

'I'm coming,' Daisy answered.

'I'll make us some coffee.'

Daisy heard the kitchen door shut and the tap run. Judy was a good friend, not many people would have left her to her own devices this long. She dragged herself off the bed and into the bathroom to wash her face. It was easy to resist the temptation to glance in the mirror. She knew she looked dreadful, she felt no need to confirm it.

Trevor Joseph was waiting for her in the living room.

'Hello,' she spoke slowly, carefully, struggling to keep her voice steady.

'Hello again,' the sergeant rose to his feet as she entered the room.

'Please, sit down.'

'Thank you. We have met before today, Dr Sherringham.'

'Your face is familiar,' she conceded.

'I was one of your patients, I had a...'

'Broken and lacerated leg,' she finished for him.

'You remember ailments, not people?' He lifted a questioning eyebrow. There was a comical expression on



his face that would have made her smile under normal circumstances.

‘Doctors are like that I’m afraid.’ The door swung open and Judy walked in with a tray.

‘Excuse my dress, or rather lack of it.’ The sleeves of her kaftan swung wide when she set the tray down on the coffee table. ‘If you don’t mind, I won’t stay. I have to dry my hair.’ She patted the towel turban on her head.

‘Thank you, Judy,’ Daisy said gratefully.

‘Don’t go eating any biscuits,’ Judy warned as she left the room. ‘They’re for him, not you. We’re going to eat later.’

‘Yes, mother.’ Daisy poured the coffee and handed Trevor a cup.

‘I’m glad to see that someone’s looking after you.’

‘Judy’s a good friend.’

‘Thank you.’ He poured milk and spooned sugar into his cup, noticing that she left her own black and unsugared.

‘You’re allowed to eat,’ she reminded him, pointing to the chocolate biscuits Judy had arranged on a plate. He took one.

‘This is very civilised, and more than welcome after the day I’ve had.’

‘You’re not on duty?’ she asked.

‘No. I’ve finished. For tonight at least.’

‘Thank you for coming to the hospital this afternoon.’ She sat back in her chair. ‘Alan told me you came as a personal favour to him. I know it should have been a raw young constable.’

‘It was nothing,’ he was embarrassed by her gratitude. ‘Alan’s always ready to help whenever I need something. I’m only sorry that Peter was as heavy-handed as he was.’

‘Heavy-handed maybe,’ she agreed. ‘But undoubtedly right. Don’t most people disappear because they want to?’

‘Usually they’re not doctors on emergency calls,’ he said uneasily. ‘To be frank, Peter’s been through a rough time lately. He’s a good officer, but I think he’s allowing his personal life to intrude on your husband’s disappearance. His wife ran off with another man about a month back. She left one day when he was at work. No note, nothing. It took Peter two days to track them down. They were in her sister’s flat in London.’

‘I’m sorry.’ She wasn’t in the least sorry. She’d taken an instant dislike to Peter Collins. Her sympathies lay with his wife. It couldn’t have been easy being married to a man like him.

‘Does your husband ever work in Dr Richard Sherringham’s clinic?’

‘No,’ she replied shortly. ‘Tim and Richard are closer than most brothers and Richard has asked Tim to work in his clinic, but he hasn’t succeeded in getting him there yet. Why do you ask?’

‘Because some pretty important patients frequent the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic. And your brother-in-law is a pretty important person himself. He invites a few friends around for drinks and we get a night’s overtime.’

‘I fail to see what connection Richard’s lifestyle has with Tim’s disappearance.’

‘In an ideal world where everyone was treated equally, none. But we’re corrupt enough to treat some people – important people,’ he added, ‘differently. The men upstairs jumped when Peter and I filed our report this afternoon.’

‘And now you’ve come for Tim’s photograph?’

He nodded. ‘For the moment it will only be used internally. If the decision is made to go public, you’ll be consulted.’

‘Public?’

‘The press, newspapers, television coverage, that sort of thing.’

The coffee cup shook in her hand; she set it on the table. ‘I’ll look for the photograph.’ She walked over to the cupboard and pulled out a drawer. ‘These are the most recent ones I have of Tim.’ She handed him a set she had downloaded from her camera a few weeks before.

‘Nice boat,’ he commented when he flicked through the shots.

‘It is.’ A tidal wave of weariness overwhelmed her. She needed to be alone, to cry, to think, to sort out her battered feelings. She ran her hands over her head wishing that he would go and leave her in peace. This sitting round, making small-talk, drinking coffee, seemed so pointless, so utterly ludicrous. Like worrying what clothes and hairstyle to wear to a funeral.

‘I’ll take these if I may.’ He picked out two close-ups of Tim. One had been taken on board their yacht. Tim was looking out to sea, his hair windblown, his face blanched by the cold sea air. The other had been taken in their dining room, at a party they’d given to celebrate Tim’s promotion to registrar. Alan Cummins had snapped them unawares. They were relaxing at the table, glasses in hand, eyes fixed on one another.

‘When will I get them back?’

‘As soon as we copy them into our computers.’ He left his chair. ‘Thank you, Dr Sherringham, you’ve been most helpful.’

‘You’ll let me know the minute you find anything?’

‘I promise. Try not to worry. I’m sure there’s a simple explanation for your husband’s absence.’

“Absence” sounded far less serious than “disappearance.”

‘Thank you, Sergeant Joseph.’

‘Do you think you could bring yourself to call me Trevor?’

‘Thank you, Trevor.’ She showed him out impatiently, wanting silence. A peaceful silence in which the phone could ring, the door bell sound, with Tim standing there...

‘I’ll be in touch.’

‘Goodbye.’ She closed the door.

He stood in the communal corridor for a moment and reminded himself that she wasn’t alone. Judy Osbourne was with her. And Judy was a doctor.

‘Is she cracking yet?’ Peter Collins asked when Trevor climbed into the car.

‘She’s edgy, but who wouldn’t be given the circumstances?’ Trevor replied, refusing to be provoked by Peter’s banter. The last thing he wanted was an argument and Peter had been as unpredictable as a rabid dog for the past couple of weeks.

‘Is she alone?’

‘Dr Osbourne is with her.’

‘The frigid blonde we met in Cummin’s office?’

‘That’s the one.’

‘I know some medicine that will cure that particular doctor.’ Peter started the car.

‘Perhaps she doesn’t need it,’ Trevor suggested evenly.

‘Her sort always need it, and never get it. That’s why they’re bitchy.’

‘And you’re the bloke to give it to her?’

‘I’m the one.’ Peter drove on for a short while in silence, then suddenly swung the car into a screeching U-turn.

‘What’s up?’ Trevor enquired mildly. Five years of working with Peter Collins had given him an immunity to his colleague’s erratic behaviour.

‘We’ll go back on the motorway. You never know.’

‘The road’s probably worn away. Every patrol car in the district has driven along it by now.’

‘Very possibly.’ Peter concentrated on the road for a few minutes. ‘You know Daisy Sherringham’s sort invariably do,’ he observed acidly.

‘Do what?’ Irritation rose like bile in Trevor’s throat. Peter could say what he liked about Judy Osbourne, but Daisy Sherringham was another matter. Tim Sherringham was already down in his books as a lucky man. It would be nice to think that someone would be as distraught about his disappearance as Daisy was about Tim’s. But his chance had come – and gone, a long time ago.

‘Crack up.’ Peter’s words bludgeoned into Trevor’s thoughts.

‘Leave it off, Peter,’ he retorted with uncharacteristic savagery. ‘You’ve lived in a sewer for so long you don’t even know how to come up for air.’

‘Occupational hazard,’ Peter gave a short mocking laugh. ‘It happens to us all. Even you one day, believe me.’

Ignoring Peter’s last remark Trevor sat low in the passenger seat and watched the street lights flash by as they drove from the suburbs towards the main artery that led into town. His Achilles heel was Daisy Sherringham, and he knew it. He had fancied – no – not fancied, that was a word that applied to pub pick-ups and amateur prostitutes. He’d been attracted to her the very first time he’d set eyes on her, and the situation had been far from romantic.

He’d been stretched out on a hard narrow examination couch in Casualty, trouserless, his battered legs naked in all their torn and bloody glory. She had walked into the

soulless, used in cubicle and he'd felt as though the sun had emerged from behind the clouds.

He'd looked at her and asked, "Are you my angel of mercy?" The situation had been absurd. He, the hardened, experienced copper, able to cope with whatever unsavoury episodes fate tossed his way, had flung out a hackneyed phrase more appropriate to a moonstruck schoolboy.

"I'm the houseman," she'd replied in an off-hand manner that told him she was used to dealing with inappropriate banter from male patients. But he'd persisted, wanting to make her see that it wasn't casual. Not in his case.

"Do you mind telling me how you did this?" She'd prodded his leg gingerly with her gloved forefinger.

"I got caught up in an argument. There was a car and a wall. I became stuck between the two, and, as you can see, I lost."

"That will teach you to stay in at night." Her eyebrows had lifted slightly and she'd smiled at him. He'd never seen eyes like hers before, misty grey, with a trace of humour that made him smile himself, despite the pain that thrashed around inside him.

Her dark hair had been pinned back, just as it had been today. Yet he was sure, absolutely certain, that it would be long, curling softly at the ends.

"Can you feel this?" she'd touched his right shin. He'd nodded, and a wave of nausea had washed over him. God how he'd fought that sickness. The ignominy of needing to throw up in front of her.

"Sergeant Joseph is a policeman," the nurse had chipped in. Strange, he'd thought the nurse good-looking before Daisy Sherringham had walked into the cubicle, now he couldn't even remember what she'd looked like.

"Policeman or not, I think you'd better get him a bowl," Daisy'd said.

“We should get together one night,” he’d blurted out clumsily when the nurse had left to empty the bowl. Daisy had glanced at him coolly before shifting her gaze back his legs.

“I’ve more man in my life than I can cope with now, but thank you for the compliment, Sergeant Joseph.”

“More man – more man – more man –,” the words echoed at him from the windscreen wipers. Drizzle, bleak shiny grey road, and a missing person’s report. His present.

‘Door to door service. Pick you up at eight tomorrow.’

‘Thanks, Peter.’ Trevor shook himself out of the past. He was behaving like a love-sick fool. How long had it been, six months? No, a year. He’d forgotten how long it had taken his legs to heal. He was daydreaming about someone he’d tried and failed to pick up over a year ago. ‘What do you think has really happened to this doctor?’ he asked as he left the car.

‘Beats me.’ There was an inflexion in Peter’s voice that said he didn’t care. ‘On the surface he appears to be steady enough. Hardly the sort you’d expect to clear off without a word to anyone. But then, you never can tell.’

‘And if he hasn’t cleared off?’

‘You know the answer to that one as well as I do.’ Peter’s eyes narrowed against the orange glare of the street lamps. ‘There are enough junkies and pushers freaking out in this town to make your average Saturday night mugger look like Orphan Annie. But I’ll tell you something for nothing. You and your bloody hospital connections have got us landed with this one. It’s my guess we’re going to be the poor sods who get given the leg work. The Sherringham connection has upset upstairs, and whenever they’re upset, we get a mess to clear.’

‘We’ll see.’

‘Sure you won’t change your mind about that drink I offered to buy you?’

‘No, thanks. See you in the morning.’ Trevor closed the door.

Peter revved the engine and drove away. Trevor looked up at the darkened windows of his flat. This morning he’d been – if not happy – content with the two poky rooms, bathroom and kitchen, set over the grocer’s shop. But that had been before he’d seen the Sherringham apartment. So what was his problem?

Envy for what he couldn’t have? Money on a scale that shrieked inheritance rather than earnings? He pushed his key into the lock of the side door, then remembered there was no food in his fridge. He’d have to go downstairs and forage. And what great delicacy lay in store for him tonight in Frank’s freezer cabinet? Fish fingers? Beefburgers? A frozen dinner for one? His stomach wilted at the thought. Perhaps he wouldn’t bother, just get himself a drink and watch TV until bedtime.

He looked around the empty street. Was it any wonder he’d spent the last ten minutes dreaming about Daisy Sherringham? With his life the way it was, what else was there for him to do? He jerked his key out of the lock and walked away. He’d go to the local, eat a plastic pie, drink some beer, talk to the natives, and with luck he might avoid turning into a cold, self-sufficient, hard-bitten bastard like Peter. People needed friendship, time out for relaxation. Even coppers.

A few minutes past two in the morning Peter Collins left the smoke-laden back bar of the White Hart to begin his one and a half mile walk home. On a summer evening it would have been a pleasant stroll. Leave the pub by way of the beer garden, down the rough wooden steps that led to the beach, strike out along the shoreline of the curve of the



bay that bit into the centre of the town, and into the house through the sandy yard that had once been part of the beach. No roads. Only sea and shore as near to its natural state as tourists, litter, sewage, and the town council allowed it to be.

He'd been walking the path for four weeks, but never in daylight, only during the dark, cold hours of early morning. Four weeks – ever since that silly bitch Wendy had run out on him. He'd been bloody angry – but that had been before common sense, and Trevor, had prevailed. After all, what would he have accomplished if he had followed her and the jerk she'd run off with to her sister's place? He'd only have lost control. Killed her, and possibly the jerk. They weren't worth the effort.

The only part of him she'd damaged was his pride. It had taken him barely a week of hard drinking to write her out of his life, and he'd spent some of that time going through the cupboards of the neat suburban semi they'd shared. He'd collected all the important papers he could find, mortgage agreements, insurance policies – every last thread that tied them together and mailed her the lot.

He went to a solicitor and told him to arrange a divorce as quickly as possible, one that would give Wendy everything they owned except his clothes and CD's. And to pass on the message that he'd see her in hell before he'd give her a penny more.

He'd packed his bags and moved on without a backward glance. His married life was over. Enter Peter the wolf. But four weeks had been enough for him to realise the only difference between Peter the wolf and Peter the married man was the absence of argument in his life. It had come as a pleasant, if not altogether unexpected, surprise.

Within two days he'd rented the flat. He'd always fancied living next to the sea, but the old Edwardian

houses had never been smart enough for Wendy. She'd wanted a garden, her own, not shared. A patio, fitted kitchen, fitted carpets, double-glazing, regular meal-times, twee evenings out with her dull boring friends (who were anything but police) in plastic pubs, not the dives he frequented. God how he'd quarrelled with her over the petty things she put such store by.

Silly bitch! And stupid him for marrying her. He kicked a pebble into the waves that swished gently on to the beach. The best thing she'd ever done was leave him, and the idiot who'd taken her on would soon find out how shallow she was. But perhaps they deserved one another.

Thrusting his hands into the pockets of his padded anorak he looked out over the dark, swaying sea. The lighthouse blinked on the rocky promontory that struck out on his far left. In front of it, moonlight highlighted the ragged outline of the wired-off pier. Derelict, dangerous, it bore testimony to the unpalatable fact that the town didn't have enough money to clear up all the rotting messes left from its past.

He walked on slowly. What was it about waves, water, the eternal movement of the sea, that cast a primitive calming spell?

He stepped down to the shoreline, his footsteps wiped clean by the water swirling amongst the pebbles. Strange how soon life became a routine. Even a new life. He could easily have taken his car along the coast road that wound past his flat and the White Hart. No copper on the beat would dare stop a sergeant, least of all him, even if they knew he'd had a skinful of beer. But he'd come to like this walk home. It provided him with thinking time, and God only knew there was precious little of that during his day. And there wouldn't be while Trevor Joseph took on work that shouldn't be theirs. Like the bloody Sherringham case.

Would Joseph ever grow up? Stop trying to help every Tom, Dick and Harry who asked for favours? They were attached to the Drug Squad, not missing persons. Not that anyone would notice from the way Trevor behaved. A smile and a helping hand for every kid who fell from his bike. A couple of quid for blokes who were down on their luck. Last week it had been a ticket home for a runaway kid.

There was no saving the man, he thought irritably. The whole town knew him for a soft touch.

A grating noise of pebble hitting rock came from up ahead and he stopped in his tracks. A shambling shadow was groping towards him. Small, stocky, loose-armed, it swung, bottle in hand, like a drunken monkey from rock to rock. Then the singing started, harsh, and unmelodious.

‘I’ve got a lu-v-er-ly bunch of co-co-nu-ts...’

‘Dare say you have, Andy,’ he interrupted in his bored professional voice.

‘Mister? That you Mister?’ A grimy face peered slit-eyed up at him.

‘It is. Why aren’t you tucked up in the Shelter?’

‘No room at the Shelter, Mister. Not no more. There’s never any room at the Shelter. Not even for regulars like me. Too many on the streets. Times are hard. Awful hard. Shelter’s full. First come first served, that’s what the man said. Even a regular can’t get in no more. They have to queue like the rest, and they queue too early, Mister. Honest.’

‘You stayed out didn’t you, Andy? Stayed out until after they locked the doors?’

‘Not me, Mister. Not me. I don’t like sleeping rough. Not no more. I’m getting too old. I like a bed. Bed’s better than the beach, Mister. I know that.’

‘Drunk too. Where did you get the money?’ Peter demanded.

‘You know me, Mister, never any money. Never got any money,’ Andy whined. ‘Where would I get money?’

‘Same place you got this,’ Peter grabbed the end of the bottle Andy was swinging. ‘Are the Sally Army giving away free booze now? If they are, it’s the first I’ve heard of it.’

‘Found it, Mister. Honest. Found it.’ Andy grovelled and cringed in a manner born of long habit. The pretence of humble subservience was more than Peter could bear. The filth – the rags – the lice – the smell he could cope with. But not the total lack of human dignity. It revolted him. Made him sick to the pit of his stomach.

‘Keep your booze, Andy.’ He released the end of the bottle. It jerked in Andy’s loose grip and half the contents joined the slime on the rocks.

‘Don’t waste my booze, Mister,’ Andy begged, moving away sharply as if Peter was about to hit him. ‘Please Mister, don’t waste my booze.’

‘You’ve had more than enough, Andy.’ Peter remembered he was a police officer. ‘Seen any pushing on the beach today, Andy?’

‘Not today, Mister. Not today.’ Andy flopped limply on the pebbles, legs spread out straight in front of him, arms straggling wide, head lolling like a rag doll’s. ‘But I’ll tell you what I did see, Mister. Give me some change and I’ll tell you what I did see.’

‘Change for what, Andy? More booze?’

‘Breakfast, Mister. Change for breakfast. For tea and toast. I can get tea and toast up at the day centre for twenty pence. Only twenty pence, Mister. Please.’ Again that grating whine. Peter hitched up his anorak and fumbled in his trouser pocket. His hand closed over a coin and he flicked it on to Andy’s lap.

‘Bless you, Mister. You’re a regular, Mister. That’s what you are. They’re not all like you.’

‘You saw something, Andy,’ Peter reminded him.

Andy looked over his shoulder as if he expected someone to creep up on him. Peter glanced around too. There was only the moon, the light and shadow darkness of the beach. The neon glare of the town, glimmering faintly on their left. The broken pier, shrouded up ahead.

‘Ghosts, Mister,’ Andy’s breath misted in the cool air. ‘That’s what I seen. Ghosts. They’ve come back. From when I was a nipper. The ghosts have come back.’

Peter threw back his head and laughed. The sound resounded hollowly, mingling with the crash of the waves. ‘The only ghost is the one in your head, Andy. It comes out of that.’ He pointed at the bottle.

Andy craned his head as close as he could get it to Peter without actually moving his body. He whispered, ‘There’s a ghost on the pier. The show. Everyone knows about the show, Mister. There’s no need to go to the Shelter no more, not with the theatre open. It’s warm in the theatre, Mister. Like it was a long time ago. When I was a nipper. There’s jokes and music again. People laughing, happy people. The clown’s back. You should see him, Mister, his painted face, his suit – he’s all black and white and shiny, like – like –’

His voice slurred as his mind fumbled for something black and shiny. ‘Like bags, Mister, them black bags they keep clothes in at the Shelter. And he sings, he sings awful pretty, Mister.’ His filthy hand grimed Peter’s trousers as he grasped his leg.

‘I can get you in, Mister. I know how,’ the offer wafted on Andy’s fetid breath. Repelled, Peter jerked his leg sharply, and broke Andy’s grip. Andy fell, face downwards on to the pebbles, but he continued mumbling.

‘They trust old Andy. They’re my friends. They let me in. I don’t need money. I can get you in too. I’ve got this,’ his eyes lingered lovingly on the bottle he clutched.

‘We can go now, Mister. Help me up.’ He stretched out his filthy paw. ‘I’ll show you the best seats. They’re in the back. You can put your feet on the chairs in front. We’d be like lords, Mister. Like lords – Go there now –’ Andy began to relax, the bottle slid between his loosening fingers before rolling on to the pebbles. The last of its meagre contents spilled out on the beach.

Peter stared down at Andy for a moment, then rolled him over with his foot. Andy was dead to the world – dead drunk. Peter measured the distance between the sea, and the line of debris that lay on the sand above Andy’s head. The fool was lying two metres below the tide-line, and the sea was still coming in. The idiot could drown.

Quelling his revulsion, Peter gritted his teeth and edged his foot beneath the greasy shreds of clothing that clung to Andy’s emaciated body. Gingerly, he kicked the drunk backwards. His foot broke through the rotting cloth. Fuck it, he had to touch him after all. There was no other way.

He left the down and out in the shelter of the sea-wall. It wasn’t that cold. Andy could sleep it off on the beach. It wouldn’t be the first time.

## Chapter Four

FIVE MINUTES AFTER PETER walked away from Andy, Daisy stirred restlessly. A draught blew across the bed, the current of cold air wasn't enough to wake her, the powder Judy had mixed into her bedtime coffee saw to that, but it was enough to break her pattern of sleep.

Then something familiar happened, so familiar she accepted it unquestioningly. A body slid into the bed behind her. Icy legs lay at the back of her thighs, a freezing torso sought warmth from her back. She reached out and grasped the frozen hand she knew would be there. Intertwining her fingers with the cold ones, she brought the hand round to her breast, shivering involuntarily as the chilly arm rested on her warm side. Wrapping her legs around Tim's she sighed softly in her sleep. She and Tim had a tacit agreement to warm one another after night calls, and she had kept to her side of the bargain. Not like the last time when he had recoiled from her.

She snuggled into her pillow then, the fog drifted from her sleep-numbed brain. Tim! Tim was back. In the bed beside her. She opened her eyes, focused on the familiar outlines. The open door, the dressing table, its mirror glinting grey reflected light from the bed, the huddled shape that lay beside her.

She didn't relinquish her hold on Tim's hand when she turned to face him. She ran her hands along his naked body, looked into his face and choked back a scream. His body ended at the shoulders. He had no head!

'Daisy – it's all right, I'm here –' the light clicked on.

Daisy blinked against the glare and stared uncomprehendingly at Judy. 'Tim was here –' the bed beside her was empty. 'He was here, Judy. He came in...' her voice rose in hysteria. 'He was here. He was cold. I felt him...'

Judy sat on the bed and held her hand. 'You screamed. It was a nightmare.' She saw the blinds move. 'I should have closed the window, I'm sorry.' She left the bed and slammed it shut.

Daisy closed her eyes, but it didn't prevent her tears from falling or stinging her cheeks with salt burns.

Judy sat back beside her. 'Can I get you a drink or something?'

Daisy shook her head.

'Shall I stay with you?'

'No. I just want to lie still... and... wait,' she whispered. 'Sorry I woke you.'

'Daisy...'

'Thank you for being here.' Daisy pulled the bedclothes over her head. Judy looked at her for a moment before switching off the light and leaving the room. But she didn't close the door.

Judy sat alone in the canteen pretending to read an article in the current issue of the *Lancet*. She'd rung Alan's consulting rooms earlier and tried to persuade him to bring Daisy and join her for the tea break, but he'd refused. The hospital was rife with rumour and gossip and he'd ordered tea to be taken to his office for Daisy and himself. That way he hoped he could shield Daisy from prying eyes and questions a little while longer.

She glanced out of the corner of her eye and spotted a crowd of housemen, Eric Hedley among them, huddled round a canteen table too small to hold them. Concentrating on the article, she tried to drum up interest



in the revolutionary surgical techniques the author was pioneering in the treatment of Parkinson's disease.

She heard muffled laughter and concentrated harder on the text in front of her. She knew what Eric, and the majority of her male colleagues, thought of her. Her uncompromising attitude had deflated the egos of even the most intrepid of the hospital's Don Juan's. None of them ever flung a half-humorous pass at her the way they did, Tim notwithstanding, at Daisy. But then, none of them had a clue about her private life.

She had passed her formative years an unwilling witness to the deteriorating relationship between her parents. She'd watched mutual passion die and her parents transformed from loving, witty and talented people who'd overseen her babyhood, into bickering, drunken fools who had blighted and embarrassed her teenage years.

Even now, she cringed at memories that had grown more poisonous with the passage of time. Her parents had both been dead for years, but she still resented the pain they'd caused her. She had learnt one lesson from them. Marriage was a straitjacket that killed the very passions it was supposed to foster. She had no intention of allowing her own life to be regulated by any man empowered by the traditions of a medieval institution. Instead, she had sought, and found, the perfect solution to fulfil her sexual and emotional desires. A solution that didn't include smirking, juvenile housemen like Hedley.

'You look terrible.'

She glanced up, expecting to see Hedley or one of the other housemen, primed by the others to pump her about Tim's disappearance. But Trevor Joseph stood in front of her table, two glasses of orange juice in his hands.

'I could say the same of you,' she countered. 'Is that what the police call "plain clothes"?'

Trevor shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. His frayed, black and white brushed cotton shirt had seen better days, but it wasn't his worst. Plain clothes for the Drug Squad rarely meant reasonable clothes, and today he'd dressed for normal duty. Black jeans, white and faded at the knees and seat. Trainers with the sole parting company from the uppers in more than one place. No belt. His thick, straight, dark brown hair hung heavily over his threadbare collar, and the finishing touch was forty-eight hours growth of stubble. He didn't need Judy Osbourne to remind him that he looked like a slob. He was all too conscious of the fact.

It was just his luck that Peter had been proved right and they had been assigned to the Sherringham case. And Peter in a fit of pique had refused to stop off on the way to the hospital to allow him to change.

"If upstairs moves the Drug Squad personnel to Missing Persons at a moment's notice they can bloody well take us the way we are."

'I'm sorry,' Trevor apologised. 'I was trying to say that you looked tired. I saw your glass was empty, so –' he held up the orange juice. 'I was hoping that I could talk to you.'

'I was just leaving.' Judy stared at him for a moment. He gave her a timid smile and her irritation deflated. Trevor Joseph was over six foot, but he was anything but intimidating. Slightly built and painfully thin, there was an innocence in his eyes that brought out a maternal instinct she normally kept well in check. The man was far too polite to be a police officer.

'I'll drink your orange juice,' she relented. 'But I only have a few minutes of my break left.'

'That's all right,' he said diffidently. 'Our people telephoned your administration this morning. We've been given permission to talk to anyone we want to, and as long

as we don't delay any life or death matters we can take all the time we need.'

'You mean I don't have to continue trailing behind Miss Palmer-Smith on ward rounds for the rest of the morning?'

'Not if you talk to me.'

She sat back in her chair. 'Fire away.'

Trevor set the two glasses on the table and sat down. Judy noticed that all the housemen had left the canteen except Eric Hedley. Still smiling, he was deep in conversation with Peter Collins.

'You're here in force,' she commented.

'We are.'

'And you're questioning everyone?'

'Anyone and everyone we think can shed light on Tim Sherringham's disappearance.' Trevor rummaged in his pocket and brought out a notebook.

'Have you any clues as to what's happened to Tim?' Judy asked.

'None, and to be honest if any other doctor had disappeared we wouldn't be here.'

'You're here because Tim's a Sherringham?'

'To be blunt, yes.'

'Why should that be important?' she demanded indignantly.

'Have you any idea who was on the guest list for the party Tim and Daisy Sherringham attended the night before he disappeared?'

'I can guess.' Judy sipped her orange juice. 'I was Daisy's bridesmaid six months ago. The reception was held in Richard's mansion. There were four cabinet ministers, six minor royals, several MPs, not to mention pop stars, actors, sportsmen, TV chefs and style gurus plus various "celebrities" although none of us had a clue what

they were famous for. You name them; if they're rich and famous they're Richard and Joanna's friends.'

'And Tim?'

'You are a police officer after all. I was wondering when the questions were going to start.'

'I don't like having to pry into other people's personal lives any more than you,' he emphasised, 'but under the circumstances...'

'The circumstances are a doctor who had everything going for him disappearing without rhyme or reason, while his poor besotted wife is half out of her mind.'

'Where is Daisy Sherringham?' he asked.

'Here.'

Trevor looked around the canteen.

'I meant here in the hospital,' Judy snapped. 'She had a bad night. I couldn't leave her alone this morning. And between Tim missing, and Daisy unfit for any real work, I thought it might put too much of a strain on the hospital if I decided to take a day off as well. I persuaded administration to allow Daisy and I to switch duties. She's working with Alan in the paediatric clinic, so he can keep an eye on her, leaving me stuck with the hospital dragon.'

'The Dragon?'

'Miss Palmer-Smith, surgical consultant.' Judy finished her orange juice and looked over to where Peter and Eric Hedley were deep in discussion. 'Your colleague's taking notes. Shouldn't you be doing the same?'

'I've a good memory.' He pulled a pencil out of his shirt pocket. 'Would you say Daisy and Tim Sherringham have a good marriage?'

'Ecstatic.' Judy saw confusion mirrored on his face. 'That's not sarcasm. Those two are really special.'

'You've known them a long time?'

'Since medical college.'

‘Anything, any fragment of information you can give me, may help. At the moment we don’t even know what we’re looking for.’

‘Daisy and I arrived at college together,’ Judy continued, ‘green and fresh from comprehensive school, believing we’d made it. Little did we know, the real work hadn’t even begun. Tim Sherringham was my father...’

‘Your what?’ Trevor asked.

‘My father,’ she repeated. ‘Third year students at our college are assigned to freshmen. They’re supposed to teach newcomers the ropes, pass on second-hand text books, explain the pitfalls, you know the sort of thing.’

Having never been to college, he answered, ‘I can imagine.’

‘Tim Sherringham was my college father, and Daisy was my room-mate. Being Tim, he took his responsibilities seriously. One day he came over with some notes and that was it. Instant chemistry. He invited Daisy to have a drink with him that night, and she moved into his flat, or rather Richard Sherringham’s London flat, three weeks later.’

‘Neither of them had anyone else hovering in the background?’

‘Not that I was aware of.’ Judy found it difficult to suppress her irritation at the personal nature of Trevor’s questions.

‘No other girlfriends, boyfriends, – fiancés?’ he pressed.

‘Daisy and Tim are good-looking, popular people. Of course they’d both been out with others. But it’s obvious you’ve never been to medical college. The work load is horrendous. There’s very little time left for socialising. Once they’d met they spent what little free time they had with one another. Neither of them ever went out with anyone else again, at least not to my knowledge. And

although I can't speak for Tim, Daisy certainly didn't have any serious affairs before Tim came along.

'After they met, were there any serious quarrels?'

'Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I'm sorry I can't come up with any dirt for you, Sergeant Joseph.'

Trevor's eyes turned cold. 'Would you rather talk to Sergeant Collins?'

'You bastard.'

'These questions have to be asked. How they're asked depends more on you, than me.'

'Feel free to carry on with the interrogation,' she jibed.

'Does Daisy get on well with Tim's family?'

'How on earth do you expect me to answer that one?'

'I'll put it another way. Are you aware of any strain between Daisy and Tim's brother?'

'What are you getting at?'

'The truth, I hope,' he answered shortly.

'All I can tell you is what everyone knows. Tim and Richard are closer than most brothers. Richard brought Tim up. Their father died when Tim was seven or eight and his mother before that.'

'So Richard Sherringham is much older than Tim?'

'Twenty years – they had different mothers.'

'Would you say Daisy and Richard resented one another in any way?'

'No,' she answered evenly.

'No relationship can be this perfect. Surely there must be something?'

Judy was tired, not only physically, but mentally. Trevor Joseph's questioning seemed to be going on for ever. 'Daisy gets on well with Richard and his wife, Joanna. It's just that...'

'What?' Trevor prompted when she fell silent.

She grappled with her thoughts for a moment. 'They're rich. Their lifestyle is different. To a new member of the family, or an outsider, they can be a bit intimidating. Distant, not because they intend it to be that way, but because we're wary of their money.' She fiddled with her empty glass. 'I'm not putting it very well. Ignore it. I'm probably making a mountain out of a molehill.'

'Not at all. I get the general picture. Daisy said something yesterday about Richard wanting Tim to work in his clinic. Do you know anything about that?'

'The subject of Richard's clinic is guaranteed to start the nearest thing to an argument Tim and Daisy ever have.'

'Tim Sherringham wants to work in his brother's clinic?'

'I don't think so, but I can only tell you what I've gleaned from Daisy. Richard wants Tim to work with him, but most of the time Tim's content to work here.'

'And the rest of the time?' Trevor probed.

'We all get fed up occasionally. Tim's not a saint, but I'll say this much for him, he only gets fed up when he can't give his patients the treatment they need. The days when the essential equipment breaks down are the worst. Or when he comes across someone in a clinic who's been on a waiting list too long, when what should have been a minor problem has turned into major surgery.'

'And Daisy's opinion on Richard Sherringham's clinic?'

'Daisy broadcasts her views to anyone who'll listen. She really believes in a National Health Service. Everyone having free access to treatment whenever they need it.'

'An idealist?'

'An idealist, whose dreams shatter every day in the face of the reality of this place,' Judy observed cuttingly. 'Most women would have loved Tim's connections and the

family money. Personally, I think Daisy hates it. But that doesn't mean she hates Tim's brother.'

'That's a bit complicated for me.'

'Daisy has no respect for a system that gives the best medical care to the richest people. And that's Richard Sherringham's system. He's a good doctor; some say the best in his field. Daisy feels his services should be available to anyone who needs them.'

Trevor Joseph laid his black note book down on the table next to his untouched glass of orange juice.

'You're no nearer are you,' Judy said. It was a statement, not a question. He looked at her.

'You're no nearer to finding out why Tim has disappeared.'

'If you mean you've given me no obvious clues as to why Tim Sherringham's vanished, I'll agree.'

'I can't tell you what I don't know.'

'More's the pity.' He watched her turn her empty glass around.

'You've told me about the Sherringhams,' he said. 'What about the hospital?'

'What about the hospital?' she enquired flippantly.

'Does Tim Sherringham have any enemies among the staff? Does anyone resent him? His connections, his money?'

'Daisy would be the first to tell you that she and Tim have no money, only what they earn.'

'I saw his apartment – their Mercedes.'

'Gifts from a generous brother,' she stated flatly. 'And if you're talking about jealousy and resentment, the only person in the hospital who falls into that category is the one who's talking to your friend.' She flicked an angry glance in the direction of Eric Hedley and Peter Collins. 'That particular houseman wanted to be a registrar. Tim



was the better man and he got the job. Eric believes he should have been given the post on age and seniority.'

'I see.' Trevor scribbled a note in his book.

'The other thing you should know about Eric Hedley is he's a compulsive gossip and a snake.'

'Anything else?'

'I don't like him.'

'I'd never have guessed.'

'The sergeant has a sense of humour after all.'

Trevor smiled. 'I have a sense of humour, but in my line of work I don't often have a chance to air it. Can I ask one last question?'

'As long as it is the last one.'

'Is there a special person in your life?'

'Is this a pass, or official business?' she demanded testily.

'I could make it official.'

She pressed her hands tightly around her glass. 'I fail to see what my private life has to do with Tim's disappearance.'

'Elimination.' Trevor said quietly. 'You're the wife's best friend. Men often have affairs with their wife's best friend.'

'And you think – My God...'

'I did say elimination,' he observed.

'There was someone,' she divulged tensely, 'until a few months back. A journalist.' She looked up at Trevor. 'He disappeared too, but don't worry, Sergeant, you won't be asked to look into his case. He was kidnapped in Iraq seven months ago. His captors announced his execution shortly afterwards but no one's found his body.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Thank you.' She cut his condolences short. 'Now it's my turn to demand something of you.'

'If I can?'

‘Go easy on Daisy Sherringham.’

‘I intend to. You said she had a bad night.’

‘She did.’

‘You’re a doctor. Couldn’t you have given her something to make her sleep?’ There was a hint of reproach in his voice.

‘I did but it didn’t work.’ Judy rose from the table. ‘You’ll tell me...’

‘The minute we find anything.’ He walked her to the door. ‘What do you mean by a bad night?’ he asked when she pressed the lift button.

‘Daisy woke up screaming around two-thirty. She was absolutely convinced that Tim had got into bed with her. She said she felt him next to her.’

‘Isn’t that only natural after a day like yesterday?’

‘That she’d dream about him? Yes.’ The lift clanged open. ‘Only he didn’t have a head.’

‘What?’

‘The Tim Daisy saw, or rather thought she saw, last night, was headless. He ended at the shoulders.’ She stepped into the lift. ‘Freud might have made something of it, Sergeant Joseph. I can’t.’ The doors closed leaving Trevor standing in the empty foyer.

Eric Hedley barged out of the canteen as Trevor walked in. Peter was still sitting at a table. It was time for them to pool information. He smiled when he noticed two fresh coffees at Peter’s elbow. His partner was getting thoughtful in his bachelorhood.

‘How did you fare with the lady?’ Peter pushed one of the coffees towards him when he sat down.

‘I came up with absolutely nothing. You?’

‘A few nuggets.’ Peter handed him envelopes of sugar and a small tub of milk.

‘Judy warned me that Eric Hedley is the hospital gossip. He’s also universally disliked.’

‘Of course he is,’ Peter agreed. ‘And you can get more out of one disliked misfit in ten minutes than you can out of a full day’s conversation with an upright, clean thinking, right-minded citizen. I thought you would have realised that by now.’

‘There’s no dirt in this case.’

‘There’s always dirt, you’ve just got to know where to dig for it.’

‘And?’ Trevor demanded.

‘For starters, your self-righteous, blue-eyed, blonde Dr Osbourne is being serviced by your friend Alan Cummins.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ Trevor said. ‘Alan and I go back years. He dotes on Carol and the kids. I’d know if there was anything going on.’

‘We’ll soon find out,’ Peter glanced at his notes. ‘According to Hedley, more than one person has seen Alan climb the stairs to Judy’s hospital apartment.’

‘Even if they are having an affair, which I doubt,’ Trevor emphasised the last word, ‘it has no bearing on the Sherringham case.’

‘Now that’s where you’re wrong. Like doctor, like doctor. Dr Cummins screws Judy Osbourne and Dr Tim Sherringham screws...’ He flicked through his note book, ‘Dart, Amanda Dart. She’s a student nurse in maternity and she and Tim Sherringham have been seen together, whispering, hiding in linen cupboards, leaving the hospital arm in arm when Daisy Sherringham’s on night duty.’

‘This,’ Trevor flicked his finger at Peter’s notebook, ‘could be the ranting of a jealous man.’

‘Could be, or it could be the edge of the thread we’re looking for. What’s the matter, Joseph? You’re uncommonly touchy on this one. Don’t want to see the

knight in shining armour or the damsel in distress knocked down to gutter level?’

‘Not unless they deserve it.’

‘If we get it wrong, we’ll apologise.’ Peter pocketed his notebook and drained his coffee cup. ‘Are you coming down to the maternity ward with me, or not?’

Trevor finished his coffee and followed Peter out of the door. There was a bitter taste in his mouth that had its origins in more than foul instant coffee. Peter had him taped for what he was – a romantic. But was it really so naïve of him to expect that most people only slept with their partners? That some women didn’t sleep with any and every man who made a pass at them behind their husbands’ backs? Peter’s wife, his girlfriend, surely they were the exception, not the rule.

## Chapter Five

‘SERGEANT?’

‘Collins.’

‘Sergeant Collins.’ Sister Hemming gave Peter her most withering look. It might have affected a lesser man.

‘Sister Hemming, we’re not here for the benefit of our health. We’re engaged in police work. If you have a problem with that, I suggest you call Hospital Administration.’

‘That won’t be necessary,’ she replied curtly. ‘I received their directive this morning. But I fail to see what useful information Nurse Dart can give you.’

‘She works on this ward, as did Dr Sherringham.’

‘Dr Sherringham is the registrar. Nurse Dart is a student nurse,’ the sister stated firmly. ‘I assure you she knows nothing that could possibly be of any interest to you.’

‘Perhaps you’ll allow us to be the judge of that,’ Peter said evenly. ‘Do you have a room that we can use to interview Nurse Dart?’

The sister knew when she was beaten. ‘You may use my office,’ she thrust the door open. ‘I’ll send Nurse Dart in.’

‘I’m glad I’m not about to have a baby.’ Trevor closed the door behind him.

‘Old school Tartar.’ Peter sat behind the sister’s desk. He pushed a tray of patients’ notes to one side and propped his feet up on the desk.

'If there is anything between Tim Sherringham and this nurse, the sister certainly isn't in the know.' Trevor perched on the windowsill behind Peter.

'She's hardly the type of warm, loving human being anyone would want to confide in.'

There was a timid knock at the door.

'Come in,' Peter shouted.

'Sister said you wanted to see me.'

'If you're Amanda Dart we do. Come in. Sit down.' Peter pointed to the only other chair in the room. Any doubts Trevor had about Hedley's allegation disappeared the moment Amanda Dart walked into the room.

His first impression was spectacles. Huge, black, cheap frames holding deep pebbled lenses. The rest of her was insignificant. A thin, peaky face balanced on top of an inadequate body. Scrawny arms and legs that reminded him of winter branches with the bark scraped off protruded from a skimpy, short-sleeved, yellow uniform dress. She was tiny, no more than five feet. Her hair was straight, mousy, cut short in an unstylish, institution cut. Orphan Annie would have looked like royalty in comparison. And Tim Sherringham, six foot six inches, one hundred and ninety pounds, blue eyes, black curling hair, and by all accounts possessing the kind of looks that attracted women like ants to sugar – and affluent – and sophisticated – was supposed to be having an affair with this girl when he was married to Daisy. Never in a million years. Peter really had been led down a blind alley.

Amanda sat down, and peered up anxiously at Peter through weak, watery brown eyes. Hands twitching, she fiddled with a grubby handkerchief she wrapped and unwrapped round her fingers.

'Don't be afraid, there's nothing to worry about.' Peter's gruff pronouncement had absolutely no effect on her.

‘You’re policemen?’ she faltered in a small voice.

‘That’s right. I’m Sergeant Peter Collins, this,’ he indicated Trevor, ‘is Sergeant Trevor Joseph. We’re here to ask everyone questions about Dr Tim Sherringham. You know Dr Sherringham?’

She nodded.

‘You know he’s disappeared?’

She nodded again, bent her head and looked down at her lap and Trevor noticed red rings around her eyes. She’d been crying. Tim Sherringham? Or the bloody-minded ward sister?

‘Did you know Dr Sherringham, I mean Dr Tim Sherringham, very well?’

‘We all know Dr Sherringham,’ she whispered. ‘He’s kind. Always got a word for all the workers in the hospital, no matter who they are or what they do. He treats everyone the same, whether they’re a consultant surgeon or a student nurse...’ she faltered, and blew her nose noisily in the handkerchief.

Trevor’s sixth sense began to needle him. There was something between Tim Sherringham and this girl after all. He felt it. The question was, what? Tim Sherringham couldn’t possibly have any romantic interest in Amanda Dart. Not with Daisy waiting at home. He couldn’t believe it.

‘What did Dr Sherringham say to you?’ Peter asked.

‘Not a lot,’ the girl made an effort to pull herself together. Trevor found it painful to watch. ‘He said no more to me than he said to any of the other student nurses.’

Peter leaned towards her. ‘We’ve heard differently, Nurse Dart.’

Her eyes grew round behind the lenses. ‘I – I – don’t understand,’ she stammered.

‘I’ll spell it out for you.’ Peter lifted his feet down and moved even closer towards her. ‘We have witnesses who

have seen you and Dr Sherringham leave the hospital together. These same witnesses have seen you and Tim Sherringham whispering in linen cupboards, sluice rooms. Do you understand me now?’

‘What are you suggesting?’ Her whole body was quivering. She was clearly terrified.

Trevor stepped in. ‘We’re trying to help Dr Sherringham,’ he interposed. ‘He could be hurt, lost somewhere, in trouble. We simply don’t know. The only thing we do know for certain is that he disappeared while driving to this hospital. You’ve worked on this ward with him. You must know something of what goes on. He told his wife he was coming in to operate on a Mrs Hawkins. Was this person important to Dr Sherringham?’

‘You’d better ask sister, I’m only a student nurse.’

‘But you do know the patients on this ward?’ he pressed. ‘Mrs Hawkins for instance?’

‘Yes I know Mrs Hawkins. She lost her baby.’

‘You didn’t answer Sergeant Joseph’s question,’ Peter broke in. ‘Was Mrs Hawkins important to Dr Sherringham?’

‘She’d had a lot of miscarriages. Dr Sherringham tried to reassure her. But she was no more important to him than any of the other patients. He treated...’

‘Everyone the same,’ Peter finished for her. ‘What about the times you went off alone with Dr Sherringham? Where did you go?’

‘I never went anywhere with Dr Sherringham,’ she protested. The tears were back in her eyes, Trevor could see them welling up, misting her lenses.

‘We could take you down to the police station,’ Peter threatened.

‘I’d still know nothing. I know nothing.’ Her voice wavered in hysteria.



Trevor jumped down from the window sill and looked into her eyes. 'I think you do know something. Why won't you tell us what it is? However trivial you believe it to be, it could help us.'

'How many times do I have to tell you that I don't know anything about Dr Sherringham?' She pulled her glasses from her face. They were damp with tears and there were pressure marks at the sides of her nose where the frames had rested. She scrubbed at her eyes with her dirty handkerchief. 'You can lock me up if you want,' she said to Peter. 'But I can't tell you what I don't know.'

'No one is going to lock you up, Amanda.' Peter leaned back in his chair. 'Let's talk about the last time you and Dr Tim Sherringham worked together.'

Twenty minutes later Amanda Dart left the office. She sagged like a limp rag that had been wrung dry. Trevor didn't feel much better. Only Peter had survived the interview unscathed. And they were still no further forward.

'I don't know about you, Joseph, but I want off Serious Crimes and back to the Drug Squad.' Peter returned his feet to the desk.

'There has to be something that we're missing.' Trevor looked out of the window. Matchbox cars and miniature people moved in and out of the car park below. Ranks of neatly lined cars glinted in the spring sunshine. His eyes shifted automatically along the rows, looking for a blue Fiat.

Peter reached inside his jacket and produced a pack of cigars. He offered one to Trevor. Trevor shook his head. 'We've a doctor with everything to live for and no apparent problems, who gets called out at three-forty in the morning, only he isn't according to the records.' He struck a match on his boot and lit his cigar. 'We've a hospital

department and a telephonist who swear Tim Sherringham wasn't paged until seven-thirty that morning, by which time he and his car have disappeared off the face of the earth. We've a clean stretch of motorway and an apparently normal wife who's close to flipping her lid.'

Trevor turned away from the window and gave Peter a hard look.

'You're not the only one who's heard Judy Osbourne's story. A clerk in Admin listened in on Judy and Alan Cummins's conversation early this morning. I know all about the headless husband.' Peter inhaled his cigar smoke. 'We also have a snide bastard who insists Tim Sherringham was having a torrid affair with a girl who looks and acts like a child at the most pathetic end of adolescence. I admit it. I'm stumped. I'd believe the first person to tell me that Tim Sherringham's run off with a circus strong man.'

'It doesn't make much sense,' Trevor agreed.

'It doesn't make any sense. On the other hand we could forget this nurse, discount the tales of happy marriage and accept that Tim Sherringham was leading a double life, and simply slipped into it with a femme fatale he picked up.'

'There's just one thing wrong with that theory.' Trevor opened the window catch and flung the casement wide to get rid of the build up of cigar smoke. 'A registrar in a busy general hospital doesn't have much time for a double life. Tim Sherringham's only had one weekend off in the last two months, and then he and Daisy Sherringham sailed down to Cornwall. Apparently they never left their boat.'

'Tried the evenings?'

'Two nights out of three, he and his wife leave the hospital together around six or seven. If one or the other is

on duty, more often than not they both sleep in the duty flat.'

'Togetherness. Fuck their loving mediocrity.' Peter spat a curl of tobacco from his mouth. 'It leaves nothing for us to grab hold of.'

'Sergeant Collins.' Sister threw the door open. 'If you've quite finished browbeating my staff.'

'We have, sister, thank you.'

'Then I'll thank you to put out that cigar. There's no smoking in this office or on the ward.'

'Until next time.' Peter lifted his feet from the desk, and rose from the chair. 'Thank you for your hospitality.'

'Where to now?' Trevor asked when they were in the main corridor.

'We've done all we can here.' Peter walked towards the lift. 'If upstairs want more, they can call in the heavy squad.'

'Alan, can I have a quick word?' Judy stuck her head around the door of Alan's office.

'If you'll excuse me,' Alan apologised to his small patient and her anxious mother. 'I won't be a moment.'

Daisy left the chair she'd been sitting on all morning, and followed him out of the door.

'I just wanted to talk to Alan, Daisy,' Judy protested.

'If you're going to talk about Tim, I'd rather hear the worst for myself,' Daisy said unequivocally. Alan looked at her keenly. She was calm. Too calm. Had been all morning. Sooner or later the I would shatter. He only hoped that someone would be able to pick up the pieces that were left.

'It's only a rumour. Gossip of the worst kind. I wanted to warn Alan before he heard it from someone else.'

'If it's about Tim's disappearance, I have the right to hear it,' Daisy insisted. A nurse walked past.

'Let's move out of this corridor.' Alan pushed Judy and Daisy into one of the examination cubicles and pulled the curtain behind them. 'If we keep our voices low, perhaps the rest of the hospital won't hear what you have to say, Judy.'

'Daisy, I'd be happier if you weren't here,' Judy pleaded.

'Tell me, Judy. Straight,' Daisy demanded.

'I said it was rubbish,' Judy paced up and down. 'Those two policemen, your friend and his sidekick,' she looked accusingly at Alan. 'They've been asking questions around the hospital all morning.'

'I saw them arrive.'

'They've talked to one person too many. I'd say it was Hedley.'

'And?' Daisy crossed her arms.

'Whoever it was, told them that Tim was having an affair with one of the nurses in maternity.'

The silence lasted a few seconds.

'Which one?' Daisy might have been enquiring after a dress Judy had bought.

'The small mousy one with glasses.'

'Dark?'

'I think her name is Dart, Amanda Dart.' Judy laid her arm around Daisy's shoulders. 'I told you it was preposterous.'

'But it's being said.'

'You know what this place is like. There's always gossip. I wanted to talk it over with Alan. Discuss the best way of tackling it.'

'By shutting me out?'

'Daisy, you have enough to cope with. Judy was thinking of you...'

‘I realise that, Alan. Thank you for your consideration, but I am neither an invalid nor a child.’ She sat on the edge of the examination couch. ‘Have you heard anything else?’

‘Nothing new. Daisy,’ Judy caught hold of her friend’s hands. ‘Wouldn’t it be better if you went home? I could take some time, come with you, we could...’

‘What?’ Daisy said frigidly. ‘Search for Tim’s headless body, or sit and play patience until some stranger stumbles across what’s left of him?’

‘Daisy, it was a nightmare.’ An icy trickle of fear ran down Alan’s spine. ‘Is it any wonder you had strange dreams last night? Under the circumstances...’

‘If you’ll excuse me,’ Daisy interrupted, ‘I’ll do what I should have done yesterday.’ She took off her white coat. Folding it neatly, she laid it on the end of the examination couch.

Judy grabbed at her sleeve. ‘Where are you going?’

‘Don’t worry, I shall be quite safe.’ Daisy glanced calmly from Alan to Judy. ‘I’m going to Richard’s. Hare will know how to contact him and Richard will know what to do.’

‘I’ll go with you.’ Judy fumbled with the buttons on her coat.

‘That isn’t necessary.’

‘Shock,’ Alan diagnosed, as Daisy’s heels clattered down the corridor.

‘She shouldn’t drive,’ Judy insisted.

‘Run after her.’ Alan picked up the phone from the wall of the cubicle. ‘I’ll get a taxi to meet you at the main entrance. Stay with her until she’s in Richard’s house. And, Judy?’

‘Yes?’

‘Once she’s there the butler will take care of her. Richard Sherringham will return as soon as he’s told about Tim. We won’t be allowed near her, then. She is one of them, a Sherringham.’

‘Sherringham or not, she’s my friend.’ Judy ran after Daisy.

Amanda Dart shut herself into her minute cell in the nurses’ hostel. The Sister had made her leave the ward. She’d wanted to work, but the old bag had told her she wasn’t fit to be on duty. What did that old battle-axe know about fitness, or feelings? She didn’t know what went on inside people. How you could work, day in, day out for weeks on end, worrying yourself sick the whole time. How Dr Sherringham had been the only one in the hospital to notice something was wrong. How he’d been the only one to take the time to listen to her. And now he’d gone. Perhaps for good. Just like...

She threw herself on her bed and buried her face in the pillow. She’d wanted to tell the police. But Dr Sherringham had said no. Tell no one – not until they knew more. But if it had just been the one with the stubble – he seemed kind. But Dr Sherringham had been so insistent. “No police.” And she’d respected his decision. After all, what had the police done for her? Laughed in her face. Told her waifs and strays were ten a penny. That they could go to the Shelter and pick up any number they wanted any night of the week. Who cared what happened to runaways. They come they go. Drifters – the country’s full of them.

“Full of them” – she could hear the desk sergeant’s mocking voice echoing in her mind when she closed her eyes. Then she slept. When she woke, her room, never bright even at midday, was shrouded in shadows. A door

banged somewhere down the hall. She could hear voices, cutlery clattering in the distance. Supper time.

She rose reluctantly from her bed. The cover was damp where her face had lain. She'd been crying in her sleep. She filled the sink with cold water, washed her hands and face, and after wiping her glasses in a towel, put them back on. She would go and see the Father. Talk to him again. He'd promised he'd help if he could.

Her hair needed combing. She did it mechanically without looking at the result, then reached for last year's sale bargain brown raincoat. She picked up her beige vinyl handbag and checked the contents. Her keys, her purse, there was four pounds and some odd silver in it, a pocket mirror, a comb. Everything she needed. She'd skip supper; she could always pick up some chips later. She had one last pang of conscience before she left the room. Dr Daisy – Dr Sherringham's wife.

Dr Daisy, as everyone in the hospital knew her, was beautiful. Tall, slim, long glossy dark hair, soft grey eyes, a sweet smile, lots of friends, she was always talking or laughing with someone, calling out to the patients when she walked past their beds. Confident, intelligent and beautiful, Dr Daisy was everything she wanted to be, and wasn't. What if Dr Daisy had heard the same story the sergeant had – and believed it?

Shouldn't she go and see her? Tell her everything? If anyone had a right to know the truth it was Dr Daisy. Tomorrow, she'd go into the hospital early tomorrow – find Dr Daisy and tell her what she knew. She opened the door and stepped out into the corridor.

'Amanda,' Emma Hasset, her arms full of paper plates and cups, bumped into her. 'Aren't you coming to Claire's hen party?'

‘No.’ Amanda found it embarrassing to be invited to anything in the hostel. She didn’t fit in. No one liked her, so why did they bother?

‘Let your hair down for once. I’ve some wine,’ Emma waved a two litre bottle under her nose, ‘and Claire’s bought tons of cake.’

‘I’m going to visit someone.’

‘Call in when you get back?’ Emma suggested. ‘There’s bound to be a crumb or two left over.’

‘Thank you, I’ll do that.’ Amanda turned away from Emma and locked her door. She knew, and Emma knew, she wouldn’t go near Claire’s room. But they kept up the pretence. Amanda was too sensitive, too conscious of her background to let anyone get close to her. The upbringing that had singled her out as “different” had remained with her, until she had become “different” from the rest of the student nurses. The dirt, the squalor she had struggled to cope with during an unhappy childhood; the hand-me-down clothes mentality she couldn’t escape, even now when she had her own money, had scarred her more than the beatings her drunken father had inflicted indiscriminately on the whole family. Not even her monthly wage packet gave her a sense of security. Perversely she still bought the cheapest, never the best. She wasn’t worth the best.

And that sergeant – that ridiculous sergeant, how could he have repeated the gossip once he’d seen her? Her and Doctor Sherringham. Was the man blind, or stupid?

Andy was stiff and cold. Had been ever since he’d woken up on the beach that morning. But there wasn’t going to be no beach for him tonight. He’d go to the pier. That’s what he’d do. It was warm in the old theatre. Warmer than outside, and there was the sea to listen to. It made him feel good, and the clown might be there. The clown made him



believe he was a little boy again. A boy with a home, and a mother to take care of him. All he needed was some change. Change for a bottle, and he'd be just fine. That's all he wanted, change.

He shuffled down the promenade heading away from the pier towards the town. There'd be no change close to the pier. Too many looking for it around there and no one dropping it. Too many like him. That was the problem. He looked up at the sky. It was dark. Night already.

Bending double he poked in the weed-choked verges, stooping to pick up anything that glittered. A milk bottle top – a sweet wrapper – a washer. He secreted the washer in his greasy rags. It might be valuable. Someone might give him change for it. One of those in the shelter who was too simple or too far gone to know the difference between change and washers.

The moon was rising over the bay when he reached the end of the promenade; he'd found no change. If he didn't find something soon it would be too late. The off-licences would be closed, and they never let him in the pubs. They threw him out before he even reached the counter. Just because they had change and he didn't. There was nothing for it but to walk back. The theatre was warm whether he had a bottle or not. He stared at the beach. The tide was in, washing close to the sea wall. Perhaps there'd be change down there.

He felt his way down the steps. Both wall and steps were crumbling, but that wasn't why he fingered the stone work. Once Blackie had found change in one of the cracks. He'd shown it to Andy. It was a gold one. A pound. They'd spent it on cider. Blackie was always one to treat you when he felt lucky. Fool! A bottle didn't go far these days. Not as far as when he first started. Then a bottle would last him all day. Not now.

He kicked his way along the shoreline, scuffing the sand with his shoes. Gravel and small shells poked their way into the gaping holes in his soles. Then a wave soaked his feet. Soon they'd be cold. And there was nothing worse than cold feet. His mam always used to say, "Keep your feet warm, Andy. Whatever you do keep your feet warm." How could he now they were wet?

He bent down and took off his shoes and socks. He would spread them out on the wooden boards of the theatre. They might dry by morning, and in the meantime he'd wrap his toes in a bag. He knew where there was a pile of good bags – on the pier, under the stage, hidden in the far corner next to the machine that hummed. Thick, brown paper bags that kept you warm, not like the black bags in the shelter that stuck to your skin, glued tight by your own sweat. There was no warmth in black bags.

He found his prize bobbing in the shallows. Soft, squishy, wet, it was floating on the incoming waves. He picked it up and unzipped it. A stream of water, thickened with goodies, poured out. He fished carefully in the water closing his fingers around a comb, and a broken mirror. He tucked them away in his rags. They could be worth change. There were girls in the shelter, young girls. They might give him change for a comb and a mirror.

He thrust his hand through the open zip. Keys – he held them up then threw them away in disgust. Keys weren't worth anything. He heard the plop as they landed in the water. He'd throw the handbag too, soon as he finished looking in it. Bags could catch you out, trip you up. He'd found that out a long time ago. Never keep anything that could be recognised. Someone would see it, and then there'd be trouble. They'd want the comb and the mirror back, and – a grin cracked the grime on his face. He pulled out a purse. It was wet like the bag, but he could

feel small, hard circles through the sodden cloth. Change. Lots of change. He'd have his bottle after all.

He emptied the coins swiftly into his hand, secreting them in the same folds of rag that concealed the comb and the mirror. Then he threw the purse and the handbag after the keys and walked away.

Lightened of its waterlogged load, the handbag floated on the waves. Andy climbed on to the promenade, singing as he went. He was happy. He had his change, and soon he'd have his bottle. Wet feet didn't matter. Not when he'd be warm and dry tonight. With a drink inside him to keep him company.

'Dr Daisy,' Hare glided noiselessly before her chair. 'Dr Richard's answering your call. You can take it here.' He handed her a cordless phone on a silver salver.

Judy left her seat on the sofa.

Daisy caught her hand. 'Stay. Please.' She picked up the receiver.

'Hello, Richard?'

'What's wrong?' Terse, and to the point, that was Richard. She swallowed hard.

'It's Tim,' she choked on the revelation. 'I don't know where he is.'

'What you mean?'

Daisy flinched as his impatience travelled across the Atlantic.

'He left for the hospital on a call the night before last' – Had it really only been two days? 'No one's seen him since. Richard, the police say he has a woman. But I know – I know –'

'Daisy, are you there?' Unable to speak she nodded.

'Daisy?'

Judy took the receiver.

'Richard, it's Judy Osbourne.'

‘What’s happened?’ he demanded.

‘No one’s seen Tim since he left to answer an emergency call the night before last.’ There was a brief silence the other end. Judy imagined Richard weighing up the situation.

‘I’ll leave for the airport. Where are you telephoning from?’

‘Your house.’

‘Tell Daisy to stay there. Put Hare on.’

‘Hare?’ Judy called out. He was standing behind her chair.

‘Dr Osbourne.’

‘Dr Sherringham would like to speak to you.’ The butler took the receiver. Judy looked at Daisy. She was sitting hunched in a massive green leather chair that dwarfed her slender figure, staring blankly down at the Persian carpet. Judy would have felt better able to cope if Daisy had been ranting and raving. Alan had diagnosed shock. Sooner or later it was going to give way. But to what?

‘Dr Daisy?’ Hare handed Daisy the telephone. ‘You don’t have to say anything, just listen.’

‘Daisy, I’m leaving for the airport. I’ll be with you tomorrow. Stay at the house until I arrive.’ There was a click, then the line went dead.

‘Drink this, Dr Daisy.’ Hare removed the receiver from Daisy’s hand and pressed a glass into it. Judy watched impotently. The Sherringham machine had ground into motion, manipulating, controlling, it was taking over, and it was nothing if not efficient. Tomorrow Richard would be here and she’d be superfluous. Alan was right. Daisy was a Sherringham, and from a distance of three thousand miles, Richard Sherringham had assumed control.

## Chapter Six

RICHARD STRODE IN EARLY the next morning, took one look at Daisy and ordered her to rest, as if she could summon sleep on command. He made her feel helpless, like a small child, but, too exhausted to argue, she swallowed the pills and water he gave her, went up the stairs to one of the guest bedrooms, crawled between the Egyptian cotton sheets and stared at the ceiling.

Then it happened. Just at it did every night. The numbing indifference that shackled her senses so mercifully during the day dissipated, leaving her prey to a tense, crawling fear that shrivelled her skin and sent icicles of terror into her spine. What if Tim never returned? What if she never saw him again?

She tried to shake off the paralysing thoughts and draw comfort from the vaguely familiar trappings of childhood. The shaded nightlight next to the bed, the feel of starched, clean linen, the faint sound of music that told her someone else was in the house.

She concentrated on her early childhood when her parents had both been alive – and together, and before her brother – her older brother – she shouldn't remember that. Not now.

Think of and remember soft words, hands stroking her hair as she lay in bed, light quick footsteps as her parents had cleared and tidied the house at the end of the day. Dishes clattering in the kitchen.

She almost succeeded. The door that led into the past opened slightly, allowing a pungent bouquet of memories to flood her mind. But the more she tried to recall the

details, the more elusive they became. Reminders of what had been flared brilliantly, tantalising, then just as quickly died, and always in the background was that other memory. The nights since Tim had disappeared, merging into one ghastly experience that she longed to block from her consciousness.

It only happened when she was asleep, or did it? Just like the first night she could have sworn that her nightmare was real. She closed her eyes tightly, praying to any God who would listen.

‘Not tonight. Please, God, not tonight.’

Her soft whispers tore into the silence until the sound of her own voice terrified her. She gripped her fists, dug her nails into the palms of her hands. She was awake and in full control. She would survive until dawn, and when it broke she would feel numb again. Too numb to comprehend the full magnitude of Tim’s disappearance.

She must have slept because it came again. She sensed it crawling into the room on all fours although she didn’t see the door opening. First there was the absolute certainty that something was there in the room with her. Then the movement of the duvet as it clambered into bed beside her.

She sat up, shrank backwards, not daring to look at the thing that was in her bed. Her back cracked against the headboard. Carved wooden mouldings bit painfully into her spine. She could retreat no further. Black spots wavered before her eyes, they grew larger, then she heard a scream.

The door opened, the light snapped on. She recoiled from its glare and it was switched off. Light streamed in from the corridor outside. Richard strode into the room, dressed in the same grey suit he had arrived in. He sat beside her bed, took her wrist in his hand and counted her pulse. She looked from Richard to the foot of the bed. It

was empty, the white lace duvet smooth. Richard released her wrist.

‘Do you want to talk about it?’

She looked at him, he was calm, controlled, but the grey streaks in his auburn hair seemed more pronounced than they had been two days before. Drained of colour, his face was lined, hollow-eyed. ‘It was a nightmare.’

‘I heard Daisy scream.’ Richard’s wife Joanna stood in the open doorway, a blue silk negligee draped over her slim, boyish figure, her cropped blonde hair shining in the subdued light of the bedroom. ‘I arrived a couple of hours after Richard,’ she explained in answer to the look of confusion on Daisy’s face.

‘I’m sorry – your holiday...’

Joanna sat beside Daisy on the bed. ‘You and Tim are family. We couldn’t stay away. Perhaps I could get the housekeeper to stay with you.’

‘I’m fine,’ Daisy broke in unconvincingly.

‘If you’re sure,’ Joanna left.

Richard pulled a chair up to the bed. ‘I spoke to Judy, she said you’d been having nightmares.’

‘It’s hardly surprising.’

‘And you don’t want to talk about them?’

‘No.’ She shook her head firmly.

Richard leaned over and smoothed the damp hair from her forehead. A strangely paternal gesture for him. She looked up into his eyes, and for the first time she saw a resemblance to Tim. A fleeting expression that went beyond his slighter build, dark auburn hair and green eyes, the obvious physical differences between the two brothers.

‘If you need me, you’ll call?’

‘I’ll be fine now. I won’t wake again.’

‘If you do, I’m next door.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Try to sleep, Daisy.’ He went to the door.

‘Yes, Richard. Thank you.’

He closed the door behind him. She lay in her bed, tense, frightened, watching the minutes tick by on the digital clock on her bedside table. One-thirty – two – the grandfather clock in the hall tolled, shattering the quiet of the house. Unable to stand the silence or the waiting a moment longer, she stole from her bed and dressed in the jeans and sweater Judy had packed for her. Carrying her shoes she crept from the room, down the corridor and staircase and out of the mansion through the kitchen door.

She sat on the cold, stone balustrade of the terrace watching the sky, until the glow of the false dawn that precedes the real one lightened the sky. Then she walked down the path that cut through the gardens and woods to the beach. Nature held no terrors for her to match those that lurked in the recesses of her own mind.

Judy slammed three coins into the vending machine, and stared at the selection on offer. Wishing they’d keep the canteen open during the night, she thumped the buttons for white coffee, one sugar. Her coffee came all right, without the cup. Cursing, she lashed out and kicked the machine.

‘If you’d take the trouble to read the notice pinned to the wall, it tells you to insert a cup before pressing the buttons,’ Eric gloated smugly, taking a plastic cup from the stack on a table beside the machine.

‘Can you change a pound?’ Judy resisted the temptation to kick him, as well as the machine.

‘I don’t believe I can.’ He didn’t bother to put his hand into his pocket to check.

She slumped into one of the stained armchairs in the doctors’ rest room. The hour before dawn was the dog end of the night shift. And it hadn’t been an easy one. Two car accidents resulting in one fatality and five injured. One wife and baby battering by a drunken husband, and a sleep



walker who'd stepped off the balcony of his third floor flat. Plus a cardiac arrest on ward nine, and a stillbirth on the maternity ward.

Eric sat opposite her. 'Is there any news of Tim Sherringham?'

'You asking out of concern or because you want to apply for his job?'

'The hospital can't run efficiently with one less registrar.'

'Have you already put in for it?'

'I've approached Bassett.'

'Bastard.'

'If it hadn't been me, it would have been someone else. Perhaps you like being a houseman, Osbourne. I've set my sights on higher things.'

'That's easy to do when you live in a gutter.'

'If you weren't a woman...'

'You'd what Eric?' When he didn't answer, she said, 'you don't know what to do with anyone. Man or woman.' She left her chair.

'You're afraid that one day you'll have to take orders from me,' he crowed.

'On the contrary, I'll never take orders from you Eric. No matter what title you stick in front of your name.'

She left him and toured the wards but she couldn't stop thinking about Tim and Daisy. She hadn't spoken to Daisy since Richard had returned the day before. She'd telephoned only to reach Hare and his polite but firm, 'Dr Daisy is resting and cannot be disturbed,' had left her little choice but to hang up.

She decided to drive out to the Sherringham mansion as soon as her shift ended. She wasn't that tired. Daisy had to eat, they could breakfast together. And she'd be on hand if any news came through. Good or bad.

Having seen Daisy walk in the direction of the beach before dawn, Richard directed Judy down the gardens that tumbled to the sea. Daisy was sitting so quiet, so still, in the grey early morning light that Judy failed to differentiate between her and the large rocks that littered the beach.

Despite her thick sweater, Judy was frozen, as much from lack of sleep as cold. She walked out of the woods and along the narrow path that skirted past the boathouse and the small wooden quay. Stepping on to the planking, she shaded her eyes and looked out to sea.

‘Good morning.’ Daisy’s quiet greeting startled Judy.

She turned and saw Daisy sitting, curled, small and forlorn on the shingle. ‘Richard said he saw you walking down here a couple of hours ago.’

‘He has watched every move I’ve made since he arrived,’ Daisy murmured resentfully.

‘I’ve been on night duty, I wasn’t tired so I decided to call in and see you.’

‘Tim and I used to spend a lot of time here before we were married.’ Daisy looked inward and forgot Judy’s presence as warm, loving memories of Tim flooded her mind.

Tim laughing in a dreadful Italian restaurant Alan had insisted on taking them to after a full day’s surgery – Tim winking at her over Palmer-Smith’s head at one of Richard’s parties – Tim berating Eric Hedley for his stupidity in the hospital canteen – Tim at the helm of their yacht the *Freedom* – Tim exploring the wooded creeks at Helford and catching crabs when the tide turned – Tim lying next to her in bed...

Judy left the quay and crunched towards Daisy over the pebbles. ‘Are you all right? Don’t answer, that’s a stupid bloody question.’

‘I’m fine.’

Suspecting sarcasm, Judy studied Daisy but there was a peculiar detachment in her friend's red-veined eyes. If she hadn't known better, she would have put the remoteness down to drink or drugs.

'Are you trying to catch pneumonia?' she braved the silence.

'I couldn't sleep.' Daisy turned to Judy but her eyes remained unfocused. 'It was good of you to come.'

'Don't be ridiculous. You and Tim are the closest to family that I have. If I can't be concerned about you, who can I be concerned about?'

'All the same, I know what it feels like after a night shift. Every muscle aching, your brain too tired to think.'

'I had an easy time. Eric was there to do the difficult bits. I just read the *Lancet* and slept between patients.'

'I'll believe that when I see it. Was Eric his usual charming self?' Daisy showed a slight spark of interest.

'I've never seen him different.'

'He's after Tim's job.'

'You know he's always been after that.'

'But now Tim's gone he's likely to get it. Isn't he?' Daisy looked to Judy for confirmation.

'You know the hospital board. They move slowly on everything. By the time they get around to noticing Tim's missing, he'll be back.'

'Tim's dead, Judy. I can feel it.'

The peace was broken by the shrieking of gulls.

'Daisy, you're tired, you're not thinking straight. Tim *will* be back,' Judy said firmly. She laid her cold hand on Daisy's even colder one. 'Is there anything I can do?'

'Richard is doing everything that can be done.'

Dawn had burst over the sea in all its red-gold glory. Daisy tried to relegate the nightmare images back into the coffers of her mind. Day, bearable day, was beginning. There'd be things for her to do, actions that would fill the

gaping holes of time, enabling her to carry on just a bit longer. Food would be placed in front of her. She'd make a pretence of eating. Richard would offer her sedatives. She'd fight his demand that she rest...

Daisy pulled her hand from under Judy's and turned up the collar on her sweater. 'As I said, Richard is doing what little that can be done. He telephoned the police the moment he arrived. All I can do is sit and wait.' She hunched her shoulders, huddling within her sweater. Judy slipped her arm around her but Daisy shrank from her touch. The only person she wanted to touch her was Tim and she wanted him with an intensity that burned. She needed to hold her husband, to feel his breath on her cheek, his body locked safely in her arms. Moving away from Judy, she wrapped her arms around her legs and rested her chin on her knees. Cold, self-contained, she resumed her study of the sea.

'Tim's not dead,' Judy reiterated.

Daisy continued to stare out to sea. She heard Judy, but said nothing.

'What did the police tell Richard?' Judy asked.

'That Tim's probably run off with another woman.'

'That's ridiculous. Tim would never leave you. Everyone who knows him knows that. Surely the police must have an idea that offers a better explanation.'

'When Tim left the apartment to answer that emergency call, it was the last time anyone saw him. It's almost as if he was wiped from the face of the earth. If it wasn't for his clothes and the photographs I have of him, I'd begin to doubt his existence myself.' She rose stiffly from the beach and walked towards the shoreline, scuffing the sand with the toes of her trainers. 'The police made me relive every second of the last few days and nights Tim and I spent together a hundred times over, and every time I come to the same conclusion. Nothing out of the ordinary –

nothing different happened during that time. That party Richard and Joanna gave might have been any one of a dozen parties they've hosted this year. You saw Tim that last day, you spoke to him. Did you notice anything strange, anything different about him?'

'Tim was Tim and always the same. I had lunch with him, Mike Edmonds and Tony Pierce in the hospital canteen that day – the day before he disappeared.'

'What did you talk about?' Daisy asked.

'As I told the police, what doctors always talk about. The state of the NHS – lousy pay – lousy chances of promotion – Eric Hedley – the patients, you've had enough conversations like that to know what I'm talking about.'

'Did Tim say anything in particular?' Daisy pressed.

'He complained about the lack of funding for the hospital. How much he'd enjoyed that last weekend break with you. How little free time any of us had.'

'Richard asked Tim to work in the clinic the night of the party,' Daisy said abruptly.

'Richard's always asking Tim to work in his clinic. It's become a joke between them.'

'Richard struck home that night, I'm sure of it. When Tim was dressing he told me Richard had only got out of bed in the middle of the night once during the last ten years, and that was the night Joanna's father had a heart attack.'

'Every time I've seen Richard and Tim together, Richard's had a go at Tim for working for peanuts in a general hospital. Daisy, you know as well as I do, Tim would never consider private work.'

'Did you see Tim speak to anyone else that day? Did you hear him say anything out of the ordinary?' There was a desperation in Daisy's voice that made Judy want to invent something to ease her pain.

‘I didn’t see him again after lunch. When I left the canteen he was still talking to Tony and Mike.’

‘What was Tony doing there? I thought he was on leave.’

‘He’d called in to say goodbye to his old NHS colleagues before embarking on his trip of a lifetime. Following Lawrence of Arabia’s footsteps – remember?’

‘Tony was at the party.’

‘He is Richard’s anaesthetist.’

‘I saw him but I didn’t get a chance to talk to him that night.’

‘Lucky you. All he could talk about at lunch was how he’d had enough of anaesthetising, hysterical hysterectomies and old men’s prostates, and he simply couldn’t wait for his holiday to start. Tim told him if he hated his job that much he should return to do more exciting work in the General. Daisy, don’t you think you’re looking for something that’s not there?’

‘I just feel so bloody helpless, so – so – outnumbered,’ Daisy said wearily. ‘Richard’s taken over. Joanna pats my hand and assures me everything’s going to be fine. And now you –’

‘Hey, I’m your friend, not your in-laws.’ Judy followed Daisy up the beach to the woods.

‘Since Tim disappeared, everyone’s been tip-toeing round me. Talking in whispers, hiding in corners, having earnest discussions behind my back.’

‘By everyone, I take it you mean Richard and Joanna?’

‘And Hare and the police and everyone else I see, including you and Alan.’

‘We’re just trying to protect you and see you through a difficult time.’

‘Promise me that from now on you’ll treat me as normal no matter what,’ Daisy said earnestly.

‘I promise.’ Judy stopped when they reached the woods. ‘This place is beautiful.’

‘It is,’ Daisy agreed.

‘Why don’t we go out and buy breakfast somewhere?’ Judy suggested.

‘Richard...’

‘To hell with Richard,’ Judy said blithely. ‘What do you want to do?’

‘You’ve just come off night shift, you should sleep.’

‘I will – this afternoon.’

‘I would like to get away from here for a couple of hours,’ Daisy admitted.

‘To do what?’

‘Look in on the apartment. Drive into town, perhaps visit the hospital.’

Daisy didn’t have to explain. Judy read the silent plea mirrored in her eyes. It wasn’t enough for Daisy to know that Richard was doing everything humanly possible and the police were out beating the countryside for Tim. She needed to look for him herself.

‘My car’s parked in the front drive. I’ll give you five minutes to get out of those damp clothes then we’ll go.’

‘Thank you.’

Judy found Daisy’s gratitude pathetic. She held out her hand. ‘Race you to the door.’

Peter Collins spun the wheel of his car and swerved from the inside lane of the motorway on to the hard shoulder. He screeched to a halt behind a ragged line of police four-wheel-drive vehicles, cars and an ambulance.

‘Did this have to happen just before my leave?’ he complained. ‘I had it all planned out. Ten days in the fleshpots of Paris. They’d never have found me to call me in.’

Trevor's attention was fixed on the uniformed figures clustered around the grass verges and hedgerows below the road.

Their superintendent, Bill Mulcahy opened the passenger door of Peter's car. 'An inch by inch search,' he declared sadistically. 'Right up your street, Collins.'

'Is it Tim Sherringham?' Trevor noted the ominously sheeted area below the bank.

'One of them might be,' Mulcahy answered.

Peter slammed his door and walked round to where Mulcahy was standing. 'How many are down there?'

'Two at the last count,' Mulcahy answered baldly. 'We've only been digging since first light. The last find was fox chewed, and scattered, so we couldn't be sure what we had until the forensic boys got here. A few minutes ago they confirmed it's a human corpse. The atmosphere down there is pretty ripe.' Mulcahy chuckled maliciously and pointed to a green young constable who was heaving up the contents of his stomach.

'Any ideas?' Peter looked quizzically at Mulcahy.

'The likes of me and you aren't paid to speculate.' Mulcahy nodded to a couple of imposing cars parked in the middle of the line. 'The big boys arrived ten minutes ago. We're strictly back-up material on this case. Take my advice – both of you. Do as you're asked, no more, no less, and be polite. If you don't, you might find your head on the chopping block.'

Trevor blessed the urgency of the early morning call that had left no time for breakfast. What would three days of light rain and warm spring weather have done to Tim Sherringham? "Pretty ripe" – he wished Mulcahy had used another adjective. He'd never had a good stomach for this kind of police work. He turned his back to the white-faced young constable and looked at Mulcahy.



‘Take four men each and systematically comb the verges and hedgerows on the other side of the motorway,’ Mulcahy ordered.

‘What we looking for?’ Peter asked.

‘Nothing. Everything. You’ll know it when you see it. By the time this is over we’ll have the cleanest motorway verge in Europe. Go across the road and section it off, I’ll send the men over to you as soon as they arrive.’

‘How much do you want us to cover?’ Peter gazed at the thin lines of woodland that stretched from both sides of the road to the horizons.

‘Eventually John O’Groats to Lands end,’ Mulcahy said humourlessly. ‘But ten miles either side of this point will do for today.’

‘Ten miles.’ Peter groaned. ‘We’ll never do it before dark, and what about meal breaks?’

‘Forget breaks. You’re a police officer, and everyone knows police officers don’t need to eat or sleep. I want both of you down the station the minute it gets too dark to search.’

‘Why couldn’t this have happened two days from now?’ Peter stepped back into the car.

‘Joseph? You’ve met Daisy Sherringham haven’t you?’ Mulcahy asked.

‘Yes, Peter and I took down the missing person’s report on her husband.’

‘Why did you two go and not the duty constable?’

‘Personal favour for one of the doctors at the hospital. He’s been good to us, and we’re...’

‘Good to him,’ Mulcahy finished dryly. ‘How well do you know Daisy Sherringham?’

‘I went to her flat to pick up some photographs of her husband.’

‘Was she upset when she found out he’d disappeared?’

‘Of course she was upset.’ Trevor’s temper rose as it always did whenever Daisy Sherringham was talked about in a bland impersonal tone. ‘Her husband’s disappeared, for pity’s sake.’

‘You think she was fond of him?’

‘I’d say so. They’d only been married six months.’

‘Do you want to come with me to the Sherringham house if we have to tell her that’s her husband down there?’

‘If?’ Trevor’s bewilderment showed on his face. ‘You have a description, photographs; surely you can tell whether or not one of the bodies is Tim Sherringham even after three days in the open?’

‘Do you or do you not want to be there if I have to ask one of the Sherringhams to identify the body?’ Mulcahy demanded.

‘Yes.’ Trevor snapped.

‘Now that’s clear, I’ll call on you if we find Tim Sherringham.’ Mulcahy turned his back and walked down the incline to the screened-off hedge.

‘What was that about?’ Peter enquired when Trevor climbed into the car.

‘Bill asked if I wanted to go along with him to the Sherringham house.’

‘And you agreed?’ When Trevor didn’t deny it, Collins shook his head in disgust. ‘I’d rather spend all day digging in dirt than take time out to do that. Weeping widows aren’t my scene.’

Trevor couldn’t justify his compliance with Mulcahy’s request. Was he egotistical enough to believe that he could make a better job of breaking bad news to Daisy Sherringham than anyone else? Or was it voyeurism? The instinct of curiosity within us all. A desire to witness the grief of others. To discover, albeit second-

hand, the dreadful finality of death. Just how shattering it can be when it happens to one of the few people you really care about. And, all the while, the detached part of you asking if you'd behave as badly or as well if it was your turn to suffer.

And Daisy was suffering. He was certain of it. He'd taken a suicidal junkie into the hospital yesterday, and seen Judy Osbourne in the casualty ward. He'd asked after Daisy and she'd brushed him aside with a brusque reply that had nothing to do with their dislike of one another. She hadn't needed to elaborate. Daisy was staying with Richard and Joanna Sherringham. Two days ago everyone in the station had been warned.

*All communications and directives relevant to, and concerning the disappearance of, Dr Timothy Sherringham are to go directly to Dr Richard Sherringham, personally.*

The great man hadn't been back in the country ten minutes before rockets had begun to fly down from London. What was being done? Had they searched the town? The motorway? The hospital? Questioned all witnesses thoroughly? (He'd been tempted to ask what witnesses, at four in the morning.) And still the pressure kept mounting until there wasn't an officer in the station who didn't react like a bear with a sore head at the mention of the Sherringham case.

Did they need extra men? Specialist teams? Forensic assistance? Yesterday helicopters had flown down from London with heat seeking cameras, presumably in response to Richard Sherringham's suggestion...

'Ready to start?'

Trevor stared uncomprehendingly at Peter. Then he realised, they'd driven off the slip road and back on. They were on the opposite side of the motorway.

'The search,' Peter prompted irritably.

Trevor stepped out of the car and studied the terrain.

‘You could hide a bloody elephant in those bushes,’ Peter cursed, ‘let alone a weapon – if that’s what we’re looking for.’

‘There may not be anything at all,’ Trevor said philosophically.

‘Even better. It’s bad enough looking for something that’s there, without wading through muck for something that isn’t.’

‘There’s no pleasing you today, is there, Peter?’ Trevor rubbed his hands and blew into them, warming himself against the early morning chill. He turned up the collar of his anorak and walked over to the verge of the hard shoulder. Looking across at the other side of the road he keyed in his position. Body bags were being unloaded from one of the waiting police ambulances. How long would it be before Bill came for him to drive him to the Sherringtons’ – if one of the bodies was Tim Sherrington? One hour, two?

## Chapter Seven

‘JUDY, DID YOU FIND Daisy?’ Richard walked out of his study on to the terrace and joined her.

‘Yes.’ Judy turned from the magnificent view that swept over the woods down to the sea. Richard was as immaculately turned out as ever, in a sober suit and discreetly splendid tie, but the hand he offered her shook slightly, and there were deeply etched lines drawn around his eyes and mouth.

‘Would you like more coffee, madam?’ Hare returned her cup to a tray.

‘No, thank you,’ Judy replied.

‘Sir?’

‘No, thank you,’ Richard replied irritably. ‘It’s good of you to come,’ he said to Judy in a fractionally lighter tone. He lowered himself into one of the Victorian wrought ironwork chairs that were scattered along the terrace. ‘I’m hoping we’ll hear something today. The police organised a public appeal yesterday.’

‘I saw it on the news. Is there anything I can do?’ Judy asked.

‘Not unless you can enlighten us in any way.’

‘I wish I could. Everyone who knows Tim knows he wouldn’t leave Daisy.’

‘We’re all agreed on that point,’ he snapped.

‘On what point?’ Joanna, simply dressed in a white linen shift, a brilliant green scarf tied loosely around her slim throat, came out of the house and joined them.

‘Tim wouldn’t leave Daisy,’ Richard replied shortly.

‘Hello, Judy. I hardly recognised you without your bridesmaid’s dress.’

Judy noticed that even at that unearthly hour of the morning, Joanna was wearing the minimum of make-up and the maximum of perfume, her short blonde hair combed in a perfect sweep across her forehead. She looked closer to twenty-five than her forty-five years.

‘We were talking about Tim,’ Richard stressed.

‘All we can do is sit and wait. All this talking, mulling over details that may or may not be significant isn’t doing anyone any good. Least of all Daisy.’

‘Speaking of Daisy,’ Judy interrupted. ‘I’d like to take her into town this morning.’

‘That’s out of the question,’ Richard declared. ‘She’s under a great strain. She needs rest, and quiet.’

‘Surely a short drive followed by breakfast out couldn’t do any harm,’ Judy persisted.

‘In her mental condition any exertion could cause damage.’

‘When I spoke to her earlier she seemed calm and coherent enough to me.’

‘You’ve seen Daisy?’ Joanna raised one of her perfectly arched eyebrows.

‘Down on the beach.’

‘She didn’t seem to be up to an early morning walk when I saw her last night,’ Joanna commented.

‘That proves my point. Daisy’s hardly slept since she’s been here,’ Richard said firmly. ‘It’s hardly calm, rational behaviour to go walking through the woods before dawn.’

‘I agree with Judy,’ Joanna drawled. ‘A short trip to town can’t possibly harm Daisy. You admitted last night that the sedative you gave her didn’t appear to be working. Perhaps if she made an effort, went out for a short while, it might tire her. She may well rest later.’

‘And if Daisy becomes hysterical?’

‘I’d bring her back immediately, Richard,’ Judy assured him. ‘We’d only be gone an hour or two at the most. I’m tired myself.’

‘Isn’t that all the more reason for you to sleep instead of going out with Daisy?’ Richard asked coldly.

‘I’ll have her back here before lunch.’ Judy left her seat. ‘Besides,’ she played her trump card, ‘Daisy’s looking forward to it.’

‘You’ve already discussed this with her?’ Richard’s face darkened in anger.

‘We talked on the way up from the beach. I asked her what she’d like to do today. Breakfast out seemed a good idea. I think she just wants to get away for a while.’

‘Richard, Judy could have taken Daisy out to breakfast and been back in the time you’ve taken to argue about it. A drive to town, a meal,’ Joanna shrugged her shoulders. ‘What possible harm could there be in that?’

Embarrassed by Joanna’s open disagreement with Richard, Judy looked at the house. She caught a glimpse of Daisy moving behind the open windows in the living room. No wonder she wanted to go out, if Joanna and Richard’s bickering was indicative of the atmosphere in the Sherringham house. She pushed her chair under the table. ‘I’ll see if Daisy’s ready.’

‘Town, breakfast and back,’ Richard warned frostily. ‘Don’t forget for a second that Daisy’s suffered a traumatic shock. No stops along the way. No newspapers and no other people.’

‘Of course.’ Judy walked away. A telephone rang somewhere in the house.

‘Have a good time,’ Joanna called after her.

Judy found Daisy in the hall. She pointed towards the front door.

‘You’ll take me to the flat?’ Daisy asked.

‘Wherever you want to go.’ If she’d had to decide at that moment between Daisy’s sanity and Richard’s she would have opted for Daisy’s without hesitation.

Five minutes after Judy drove away, Joanna rose from her chair. ‘I’m leaving as well. There’s nothing for me to do here. But there’s a great deal that I could be doing in the lab.’

‘I thought there was nothing pressing, that’s why you decided to take a holiday.’

‘There isn’t anything pressing, but there is work. I need something to take my mind off...’

‘Tim?’ Richard suggested icily.

‘And your foul mood, Richard. I’ll see you later.’ She walked into the house. A few minutes later Richard heard her car driving out of the garage. Hare appeared on the patio.

‘The police are on your private line, sir.’ He laid a telephone on the table in front of Richard.

Richard picked it up, keeping his hand firmly over the mouthpiece, he said, ‘Have all the other incoming calls rerouted to my office at the clinic.’

‘I’ve already arranged it, sir. You asked me to do it last night.’

‘I’d forgotten. That will be all, Hare.’ Richard lifted the receiver to his ear. ‘Richard Sherringham.’

‘Dr Sherringham, this is Superintendent Mulcahy.’

‘Yes.’ Richard growled impatiently.

‘I don’t have any definite news for you, sir.’ For the first time in his career Bill Mulcahy found himself struggling for words. If this had been an ordinary case, he wouldn’t have concerned himself with informing relatives at this stage. But this was no ordinary case, and Richard Sherringham no ordinary public.

‘But you have something?’ Richard demanded.



‘Two bodies,’ Bill Mulcahy’s innate professionalism took over. ‘The heat-seeking cameras picked up one, the other was close by. They were hidden in the hedgerow at the side of the motorway along the route your brother would have taken in travelling between his apartment and the hospital.’

‘Is one of them Tim?’ Richard’s knuckles whitened as he tightened his grip on the receiver.

‘Identification’s impossible at this stage, sir.’

‘My brother’s only been missing for three days, Mulcahy.’

‘One of the bodies has been dismembered and badly mutilated. The other has no hands, or –’ Bill Mulcahy took a deep breath, ‘– head, sir.’

‘It can’t be Tim – not Tim –’ Richard’s voice was weak, wavering, but his words were audible enough to be heard by Bill Mulcahy sitting miles away in his police car. The line went dead. Mulcahy looked across at Trevor in the passenger seat.

‘Possible kidnapping?’ he asked, brightening at the thought of a theory he could work on.

‘And the other body?’ Trevor asked logically. ‘Another kidnapping? Or a hit-and-run thrown there by chance to make a nice tidy pile?’

‘You’ve been working with Collins for too long, you’re beginning to sound like him, Joseph,’ Mulcahy said briskly. ‘And don’t throw cold water on my theories before we’ve had a chance to investigate them. Especially when it’s the only one we have.’

Alan Cummins hadn’t taken a coffee break since Daisy had left the hospital for Richard’s house. Instead he’d taken to spending his free time in the chilly, formaldehyde-ridden atmosphere of the mortuary. Patrick O’Kelly, the pathologist who ran the unit efficiently, if eccentrically,

had come to expect Alan's visits, and, in his own peculiar way, look forward to them.

Most staff tended to avoid the place unless they had post-mortem reports to pick up, or study. And he found it gratifying to think that a colleague was actually seeking the mortuary out, if only for personal reasons.

At ten o'clock Patrick had finished the post-mortem on an unexpected sudden death, (heart attack, forty-five-year-old woman). The audio tape had gone to administration, and he and his assistant were enjoying the sandwiches and coffee they'd laid out on a spare slab. Punctual to the minute, Alan walked through the door.

'Before you ask, the only new one in today is a death on the surgical ward. Female, twenty-three-year-old car accident,' Patrick mumbled through a mouthful of wholemeal and camembert.

'Nothing else?' Alan sat alongside Patrick on the stainless steel slab. Patrick and his assistant Paul were sitting happily, but Alan found the temperature of their improvised seat uncomfortably low.

'We may have something for you later,' Patrick continued. 'Had a call from the police about an hour ago. They've found something on the motorway.'

'Something?' Alan's heart began to pound erratically.

'I asked about Tim Sherringham. Hope it's not him. Nice fellow. They wouldn't say much more. You know the police. But whatever they've found, it's big. A Home Office pathologist is already on the scene. They asked if I'd co-operate with any work he had to do here. Do you want to see the notes on your last child battering case?' he asked, jumping topics.

'OK.' Alan agreed, preoccupied with thoughts of Tim, not the child abuse case Patrick had referred to. He wondered how long it would take the police to turn up with the "something" they'd found on the motorway. Would it

be this morning or afternoon? Someone, perhaps it had been Patrick, had once given him a lecture on the amount of work that had to be done "on site" when a body was found. It must have been at a party, because he'd been rather drunk at the time. It hadn't taken much to make him feel squeamish.

Patrick drank the last of his coffee, screwed his sandwich wrappings into a ball and jumped down from the slab. 'Bring out 347,' he called to Paul over his shoulder. 'We'll do that one next.'

'The old man with the suspected secondary tumour?'

'That's the one.' Patrick led the way into his cluttered office. He opened a drawer in the filing cabinet. 'Here it is.' He handed the folder to Alan. 'In my opinion not one of the injuries on that child was accidental.'

'Thanks, Patrick. I appreciate this.'

'It's a bit late for your patient.'

'It might save his brothers.'

'I hope so. I don't like seeing them that young.'

'Next one ready,' Paul called from the post-mortem room.

'Do you mind if I stay here a while and read through this?' Alan asked. 'No one will think of looking for me here.'

'You want to be around when the police arrive with the body they've found?' Patrick pulled on a pair of rubber gloves. 'You could always read that report in the comfort of your own office. I'll give you a call as soon as they arrive.'

'I'll hang on for a couple more minutes if you don't mind.'

'I don't mind, make yourself at home,' Patrick offered expansively. 'I understand how you feel. I didn't know Tim Sherringham well, but as I said, he always struck me as a nice chap.'

Alan followed Patrick back to the dissection room. An elderly corpse was laid out on one of the shallow sinks. Paul had turned the water on. Trickles coursed around the skeletal body and down through the drain hole. Patrick picked up his scalpel, and with a single practised downward turn of his wrist made the routine throat to pubis incision, standard to post-mortems. Paul clipped back the skin flaps while Patrick turned on and tested the bone cutter. The whirring of the blades drowned out the sounds of the police ambulance arriving. By the time Patrick had finished sawing through the rib cage, the main doors were open and the first of the trolleys was being wheeled in.

A white cotton sheet covered the stretcher. Two uniformed constables pushed it towards them. The castors clattered noisily over the tiled floor and stuck in a gulley, it took a sharp shove from one of the policemen to free the offending wheel. It drew closer, finally grinding to a halt a few feet from where Alan was standing.

‘Where do you want it?’ the policeman behind the trolley looked to Alan assuming he was the one in charge.

‘Put it over there,’ Patrick looked up from the lung he’d just cut into and pointed a bloody finger at the far wall.

‘There’s another in the ambulance,’ the policeman informed him casually. ‘And the Home Office pathologist told me to tell you he’d be along as soon as he’s finished the site work.’

‘How many are there?’ Patrick dug his gloved fingers back into the lung.

‘Two at the last count. This one is still recognisable as human. The other is a limb collection.’

The policeman nodded to Alan, then wheeled his load to the far wall as Patrick had instructed. Two more constables arrived with the second trolley. After an

indication from their colleague they also pushed their load against the wall.

‘Thank you, constables.’

‘Might see you later, doc.’

They left and Patrick glanced at Alan. He lifted his hands up and away from the body he was working on, and shook them free of excess fluids. ‘Do you want to take a look?’

‘Yes,’ Alan murmured. The abstract concept of Tim dead was one thing. The reality of Tim lying on a mortuary trolley quite another. But he had to see whatever lay there for himself.

Holding his hands at shoulder height, Patrick walked over to the parked trolley. Alan followed.

‘Paul,’ Patrick called. ‘Put on a clean pair of gloves and pull these sheets back for me?’

Paul dropped the instrument he’d been holding, gloved up and walked to the nearest trolley. He pulled back the sheet. Folding it neatly, he hung it over the end bar.

‘And the other one please,’ Patrick asked.

Alan looked down at the two heavy duty, clear-plastic body bags that were laid out on the trolleys. It took some time for him to become accustomed to the distorting layers of plastic. Then he noticed the feet of the one closest to him. Wrapped in secondary bags, they were plastered with dirt. Great clumps clung to them and lay loose inside the bags. A sudden soft thud of something live rattling against the interior of the thick plastic played on his shattered nerves. He jumped.

‘Maggots spiralling out of the raw end of the arm,’ Patrick observed coolly. ‘This one’s obviously been left in the open for a couple of days, and the insects have homed in. Corpses make excellent egg incubators, and maggot nurseries. If I was a blowfly I would look no further. Prepare two Lysol baths, Paul.’

‘Right away.’

Alan heard Patrick and Paul talking, but their conversation registered only as a jumble of words. He continued to stare blankly at the two bags. The ends of both were neatly gathered into frills, bound tightly with thick black tape. They reminded him of larger than life size, gift wrapped caches of bonbons. A sudden image of a French confectionery shop flooded into his mind, bringing with it all the sights, sounds and smells of a Parisian summer. It was one of those instant flashes of calm, totally disconnected thought that often precedes severe shock.

His mind began to clear and as it did so, grim reality dawned. Sensing something was wrong he looked again at the body bag closest to him.

‘Dear God, there’s no head!’ he exclaimed.

‘Or hands.’ Patrick read the mutilated corpse as if it were a book. ‘Pity I can’t open the bags and take a closer look. I have to wait for the Home Office chap to do that.’

‘Daisy. Poor, poor Daisy.’

As if she was responding to Alan’s cry, the main door opened and Daisy ran in, Judy Osbourne close on her heels. She looked around wildly.

Patrick moved swiftly, blocking her view of the trolleys. Paul moved even faster. He replaced the covering sheets deftly, leaving no corner bare.

‘I want to see him.’ Daisy tried to side-step Patrick. ‘I’m his wife,’ she protested. Judy caught at her hand, but she jerked herself free. ‘I’m not hysterical,’ she screamed unconvincingly. ‘And I know what he looks like. He hasn’t a head.’

The silence was punctuated only by the sound of dripping water from the dissection slab. Daisy looked at Patrick.

‘He’s wearing black evening trousers and a white evening shirt.’ She closed her eyes tightly, recalling the

clothes Tim had worn when he had left the apartment. 'Black socks, no tie, black shoes – and he has no head – or neck. The cut is clean at the shoulder blades.'

'You've been on the motorway. You've spoken to the police?'

'We haven't been anywhere near the motorway,' Judy interrupted. 'I brought Daisy to the hospital to see Alan. Before that we were in town. We couldn't even drive on the motorway because it was closed. We didn't know why until we got here and heard the rumours.'

'I don't need to see what's on those trolleys,' Daisy said earnestly. 'I've seen Tim every night since he's disappeared. Ask her' She turned to Judy. 'Tell them. Go on tell them. Tell them how I saw Tim that first night. And I've seen him every damned night since he disappeared without – without –' She choked on the words.

Alan put his arm around her shoulders. He looked mutely at Patrick.

Patrick tore off his gloves and threw them into a bin.

'Uncover the bags, Paul,' Patrick ordered.

'No, Patrick,' Judy begged.

'Uncover them, Paul,' Patrick repeated. Paul did so. Patrick took hold of Daisy's elbow and propelled her towards the trolleys. Her knees were trembling, her hands shaking. Patrick tightened his grip on her. He looked down at the trolleys.

'I can't open the bags. Not until the Home Office pathologist arrives. You understand?'

Daisy nodded, desperately trying to keep her emotions in check. The plastic bags were thick. They gave the encased corpses a specimen-like appearance. Still, immobilised, they held none of the terrors of the night time visitations that had begun to haunt even her waking moments.

‘That is most probably a woman,’ Patrick pointed to the trolley nearest him. ‘The limbs have been severed from the torso, but there’s a brown raincoat, and one of the legs is encased in a stocking. The head and hands appear to be missing, I can’t say any more than that for the present.’

Sickened by the sight of the mutilated corpses, Alan stepped back.

Patrick replaced the sheet on the first trolley and turned to the second. He’d known Tim, liked him, but in the mortuary he was pathologist first, man second. ‘White evening shirt, black evening trousers...’ Daisy heard Patrick’s voice and looked down but saw nothing. Tears fell from her eyes.

‘The body is dressed as a male, is probably male. Five foot six inches tall –’ Patrick paused when he realised the significance of what he’d said. He ran his forefinger along the length of the trolley. ‘How tall was Tim?’

‘Six foot six inches,’ Daisy whispered. It was the first time anyone other than her had spoken of Tim in the past tense.

‘Then this corpse can’t possibly be Tim’s.’ Patrick replaced the sheet.

‘It hasn’t a head!’ Alan exclaimed.

‘By using tables related to the length of the long bone I’ve worked out heights, approximate to one or two inches on a lot less corpse than this.’

‘Tim was always getting into trouble over his height,’ Alan rambled. ‘If anyone asked him how tall he was, he would always say about six foot. It used to make short men mad.’

Patrick turned to Daisy. ‘The police have found no other bodies.’

‘Then Tim’s alive,’ Judy interrupted eagerly.

‘All it means is that wherever Tim Sherringham is, he’s not here,’ Patrick replied logically. ‘I’m sorry, Daisy,



you're back where you started. Not knowing. Sometimes I think that's worse than the certainty of death.'

'At least there's a chance Tim's alive,' Judy insisted.

'No.' Daisy shook her head. 'He's dead. I know he's dead. It can only be a matter of time before he's found. And when he is, he'll look like these.'

Alan opened the door. Judy wrapped her arm around Daisy's waist and led her out of the mortuary.

Alan looked at Patrick. 'You'll telephone?'

'The minute I see anything remotely resembling Tim Sherringham.' Patrick snapped on another pair of rubber gloves.

Andy was sitting on the rough wooden boards of the theatre floor. He could see the sea, dark and glistening below him through the holes in the planks and he could hear voices. People were talking outside, he wasn't afraid because he knew they couldn't get in the building.

The only ones who knew about the secret entrance besides him were the clowns. He could see one of them on stage now, lying like a limp puppet waiting for the master to pull the strings and give him life.

He stared and the clown stared back. He wished the clown would sing and tell jokes like in the old days. He'd move to where the back row used to be, close his eyes – remember his childhood and pretend it was still like that.

The sands would be crowded, like they had been when he was little, just after the last war. The women with their flowered dresses tucked into their knickers, holding hands with small children, jumping them high over the waves that splashed on to the beach.

The men lying in deck chairs, knotted handkerchiefs on their heads, glass bottles of beer buried to the neck in the sand within easy reach. The Punch and Judy show set up in front of the steps that led up to the promenade. A

noisy, restless half-circle of children sitting around it, the grown-ups standing on the edge of the crowd and moving slyly away just before the clown walked around rattling his jar for change. And heavy in the air, the salt sea breeze that carried so many other smells – stewed tea on sweating trays – vinegary fish and chips – the sweet sickly smell of candyfloss and sticks of rock melting under the hot sun.

And the clowns, not as good as the ones his mother remembered from her own childhood – or so she'd told him. He used to sit on the edge of the moth-eaten grey blanket his mother took to the beach and watch the clowns move among the crowds, singing, smiling, joking, handing out bits of paper with the times of their shows written out on them. He'd beg, and his mother would look at him, a frown creasing her worn face.

'Perhaps later Andy. At the end of the week, if there's money left over.'

Money – change – it had always been a problem. There'd never been enough, not until he was in the army, and even then he'd lost most of his pay. Cards. The others had always beaten him at cards, and that left him short for beer.

Water poured into his mouth at the thought of beer. He wanted a drink so badly he could almost taste it. Beer, gritty, warm and flat as it had been when he'd scabbled under the deck chairs as a child and stolen sneaky sips from the buried bottles. Beer, cool and frothing as they'd served it in the German pubs when he'd been in the army.

Dazed by remembering he looked around. There was no beer here. Only the clown, lying in the darkness of the empty theatre. The only light that brightened the stage now was the moonlight shining through smashed windows. Then he heard a humming, and remembered what was under the stage. At the back.

It would be cold in the box. There'd be no drink there but he could suck at the ice bars that formed on the inside. It wouldn't be good, not like a bottle, but it would be cold. And wet.

He crawled under the stage boards. Had to be careful. The floor had lots of holes. Once his leg had fallen through and he'd hurt himself trying to get it out. The humming grew louder. The machine buzzed all the time. It was hot. Hot and stinking. He could see the outline of the box, grey in the darkness, then the moonlight poured in through the broken window at the back. He was behind the theatre now in the big room at the very end of the pier. He could hear the waves swishing beneath him.

He looked before he crept out from under the boards. Had to be careful in this room because of the clowns. There might be another lurking around and they didn't always leave him alone. One was especially bad, the one who came in sometimes late at night. The thin one. Last winter that clown had seen him, and hissed and stamped. That was when he'd run away and hurt his leg.

He couldn't see anyone. He crept low to the box. Crouching by its side he lifted the lid, put his hand inside and felt hair. Cold, weedy hairs, pushing them aside he scrabbled for the sides of the box and ran his fingers over the ice, trying to pull a piece off. He dug his fingers in, brought them out and licked them. They were cold and tasted of metal, of iron.

He put his hand back in and touched the hairs again without wanting to. He felt something loose, thin, cold; it came away in his hand. He pulled it out and it snapped with a loud crack. A piece fell off and fell to the bottom of the box. But he held on to what he had. He looked at it. Two circles of glass – glasses. You could see better with glasses. He put them on the end of his nose. But there was only one arm. They fell off. He picked them up and pushed

them into his rags. He might get change for them. Blackie – Blackie might give him something for glasses. Blackie was daft.

He put his hand back into the box for more ice. He licked his fingers. It was good. Not like a bottle. But good.

## Chapter Eight

PETER COLLINS SANK DOWN on one of the hard wooden chairs in the small soulless room Bill Mulcahy grandly referred to as “his office.” It was just across the corridor from the largest hall in the station which had been transformed into a major incident room. Bustling with plain clothes and uniformed officers, banks of telephones and computers, it was the nerve centre for what the press had dubbed “The Motorway Murder Pile Up.”

Collins had just left the late night briefing, and he hadn’t liked it. In fact, the more he thought about it the more he realised he hadn’t liked anything about his entire day – the way he and every other local’s nose had been pushed out by “upstairs” – the way he’d been working for what seemed like eternity, without a break. And, above all, he didn’t like feeling hungry. So damned hungry, he wondered if he was still capable of eating.

Bill Mulcahy and Trevor Joseph joined him. Both looked as exhausted as he felt.

‘It’s so long since I’ve eaten, that dried up potted plant looks good.’ Mulcahy eyed an Aloe Vera one of the female constables had given him to “brighten his space.”

‘Leave it for another day. Peter will buy us a steak in the Beachcomber on the way home.’

‘It’s your turn,’ Peter growled. ‘I was the one grafting in the dirt while you two swanned around in the car comforting grieving widows.’

‘Brother,’ Mulcahy corrected. ‘The widow was out with Judy Osbourne, and she’s not a widow – yet. You were at the briefing.’

'If some nut's prowling the motorway looking to chop travellers to pieces, and a man goes missing while driving along that motorway, chances are he's already mincemeat. We didn't dig in the right spot today, that's all. And don't take that as an indication that I want to go digging in the dirt again tomorrow.'

'You won't.' Mulcahy sat behind his desk.

'Back to the drug squad?' Peter brightened visibly.

'Not exactly,' Mulcahy hedged.

'Oh come on, the news is out. The pushers aren't stupid. They'll have figured that we'll be tied up on this, and have organised themselves a market day by now.'

'There are some things that need checking,' Mulcahy shuffled a pile of papers. 'Might be something...'

'And might be nothing. But knowing you, it'll all be bloody leg work.'

'Knock it off, Collins,' Mulcahy ordered sharply. 'We're all tired. What makes you so damned special that you have the right to complain?'

'Let's get on with it,' Trevor suggested. 'Otherwise we'll be here all night.'

'And then we'll never eat,' Peter resigned himself to the inevitable.

'How about we send out for a take-away?' Trevor suggested.

'Good idea. You order for all of us,' Mulcahy sat behind his desk.

Trevor opened the door and called one of the duty officers. By the time he'd finished ordering, Mulcahy and Peter had calmed down.

'It would be a feather in our caps if we could solve this one.' A ghost of a smile played around Mulcahy's mouth.

'Are you suggesting we run our own investigation?' Trevor asked warily. He'd been caught between two

factions of superior officers playing one-upmanship before and the experience had taught him that the only outcome was trouble for the officers in the middle.

‘Not separate investigations, just exchange of information – complete information,’ Mulcahy flashed a warning look at Peter, ‘every night. So much information has flooded in and is still flooding in, after the news bulletins, that it’s become practically impossible to evaluate what we’ve got. It could take months to sift through it all and in the meantime two locals prodding and poking in the right places might – just might, hit the jackpot.’

‘Us being the locals.’ Peter swung his legs on to the only spare chair in the room.

‘Where do we start?’ Trevor asked.

‘By going over what we know.’

‘That’s easy.’ Peter settled back as comfortably as he could. ‘A missing doctor, two unidentified bodies, neither of which tallies with the said doctor’s description, and an ongoing search.’

‘I thought you two were coppers. We’ve a killer, or killers, who know their motorway.’ Mulcahy pulled his note book out of his pocket and referred to its well-thumbed pages. ‘They dumped the victims there after they’d been killed elsewhere. There was very little blood or staining on site. From the knife marks in the ground there’s a strong possibility that the first victim was decapitated after death close to where we uncovered him. Forensics believe that the murderer, or at least one of them if there was more than one, walked alongside that hedge to the river bank to wash before leaving the scene. They’re testing the blood they found there now. And after the appeal, hopefully sooner rather than later, someone’s going to identify one of those bodies. And there are the missing heads and hands. They have to be somewhere. If they’re

maggot infested they're generating heat, and the heat seeking cameras will pick them up just as surely as they picked up that corpse today.'

'And if they're burnt, or buried miles away? Weighted and dumped out to sea? Dissolved in acid? Walled up in a kitchen cupboard, next to a stove? Or,' Peter lowered his voice, 'eaten.'

'Enjoying yourself, Collins?' Mulcahy became serious again. 'Even without heads, we have colouring, hair and skin. Height, approximate weight. You two can check the files.'

'Have you seen the size of the missing persons files in this station alone?' Trevor asked.

'There has to be a blood stained vehicle,' Mulcahy continued, nonplussed by Trevor's comment. 'You can't carry mutilated corpses without some staining. Checks have gone out on all the garages and cleaners, you can co-ordinate the results.'

'If the body was well wrapped and the wrappers have since been disposed of?' Peter continued to play devil's advocate.

'There's the timing. One of those bodies has only been in that hedge for two to three days. Someone, somewhere along the route could have seen something suspicious.'

'All the pathologist could say for certain was the bodies had been in the hedge for a couple of days. And all he had to go on to determine time of death was the level of bluebottle maggot infestation, and the maturity of the larvae. The victims could have been killed some time ago, kept in cold storage, and dumped at a later date,' Trevor mused.

'Then evidence may turn up to suggest where they were kept in the meantime,' Mulcahy's patience, brittle at



the best of times, was rapidly reaching expiry point. 'We have to make the most of what little we have.'

'Like Daisy Sherringham's headless body nightmare.' Peter had to get it in.

'Could be she knows more about her husband's disappearance than she's letting on,' Mulcahy cracked his knuckles. 'Perhaps we don't have to look any further than the family for the solution to Tim Sherringham's disappearance?'

'You're a mile out. Apart from the fact it wouldn't explain the headless corpses in the hedge, Daisy Sherringham was besotted...' Trevor was interrupted by a knock on the door. A fresh-faced young constable opened it and stuck his head round it.

'Supper at last.' Peter lifted his feet from the chair.

'Afraid not, sir, but the duty officer thought Superintendent Mulcahy might like to see this.' He handed Mulcahy a piece of paper. 'The telephone numbers of the witnesses are on it, sir. This brings the number of sightings to three.'

'Thank you, Constable Harries.' Mulcahy unfolded the paper.

'Don't forget our food,' Peter said.

'I'll bring it as soon as it arrives, sir.'

Mulcahy stroked his chin thoughtfully before handing the paper to Trevor. 'On the surface this looks weird, but three sightings of the same thing are too many to disregard. And there's the timing. It couldn't be more perfect.'

'A clown,' Trevor read. 'A clown dressed in a black and white suit with black and white make-up. A Pierrot?'

'We've enough bloody clowns on this case already, if you ask me,' Peter lifted his feet back on to the chair.

'This one was seen on the motorway,' Mulcahy informed him. 'Three people on three different nights saw

a clown close to the spot where the bodies were discovered.'

'And what had they been drinking?' Peter asked from behind closed eyes.

'That's for you to find out.'

'These descriptions don't match.' Trevor studied the report. 'A lorry driver saw what looked like a Pierrot hitch-hiking at around four in the morning five days ago. When he stopped the man disappeared. Melted into thin air. He even left the cab of his lorry to look.'

'The lorry driver has to be a screwball,' Peter yawned. 'Would you stop to pick up a clown at four in the morning?'

'Maybe if I saw a car broken down next to him.'

'Then you're a screwball too.'

'But there's no mention of a car, and if you look at the physical descriptions they don't tally,' Mulcahy pointed out to Trevor. 'The first sighting goes back three days. You'd better see the witness and try to pin him down closer.'

'But the clown he saw was short and plump. And the second sighting covers the same night and reports a tall thin man and the third goes back two days and reports a hunchback clown sitting on the hard shoulder.' Trevor tossed the paper on to the desk. 'Why do the nuts crawl out of the woodwork every time there's a murder?'

'To make it easy for us,' Peter mocked. 'All we want is a tall, thin, short, plump hunchback. There can't be many of those about. And once we've caught him we'll know we have our man.'

'You're not helping, Collins,' Mulcahy snapped.

'A clown – a clown,' Peter sat up and opened his eyes.

'Collins!' Mulcahy warned.

‘I’m serious,’ Peter rubbed his eyes with his knuckles. ‘I’ve heard someone talk about a clown recently. “The clown’s back – he’s back.” He looked at Trevor. ‘Does that ring a bell with you?’

‘No.’

The door opened and Harries entered carrying three large cardboard boxes.

‘They didn’t have steak, sir, so I took the liberty of ordering three double portions of pork chops and chips.’

‘Young man, you will go far.’ Mulcahy snatched the top box.

‘I know where I heard it,’ Peter opened his box. ‘Andy.’

Trevor bit at his plastic sachets of salt and vinegar and emptied them over his chips. ‘Andy’s a right clown himself. The man’s addled. You can’t believe a word he says.’

‘I found him on the beach a couple of nights back when I was walking home from the pub. I asked him why he wasn’t in the shelter. He said, “The clown’s back, in the pier”’.

‘Sounds like scintillating conversation.’ Mulcahy stuffed a whole chop “eye” into his mouth.

‘There was a lot more. It ran along the lines of the pier’s open, and the clown’s back. He said he could sleep in the old theatre on the pier. Might be worth checking out?’ Peter looked at Trevor.

‘Isn’t the pier wired off?’ Trevor asked.

‘It is,’ Peter confirmed. ‘Who owns it, Bill, the council?’

‘Don’t know, you’ll have to look into it.’

‘We could take a look on the way home?’ Trevor suggested.

‘You out to get medals?’ Peter grumbled.

‘No, another hour’s sleep tomorrow morning.’

‘Eight o’clock sharp,’ Mulcahy emphasised. ‘And be grateful. If you were on motorway digging duty it would be dawn.’

‘My back is grateful. Another day bent double peering into thick undergrowth and I’d be crippled for life,’ Peter mumbled through a mouthful of chips.

‘There isn’t a copper on the force who hasn’t had his share of backache at some time or another,’ Mulcahy wolfed down the remainder of his chips and let out a large satisfied burp. ‘While you’re checking out the pier you may as well check out the shelter. Sam Mayberry may have picked up on something if Andy’s talking clowns.’

‘Will do,’ Peter followed suit and belched.

‘Trevor.’

‘Mm,’ Trevor concentrated on gleaning the meat from his chop bone.

‘Word of warning about Daisy Sherringham. You get too involved there; you’ll find yourself back on the beat quicker than you can whistle *Be My Love*. Do you understand?’

‘Yes.’

‘But go visit the Sherringshams again and take Peter with you.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Trevor managed to keep the sarcasm from his voice.

‘Sit on them a bit. Upstairs are going through the guest list for the dinner party, but that doesn’t mean you can’t talk to the relatives. The sister-in-law as well as the brother. What’s her name again?’

‘Joanna, nee Lady Joanna Holbourne,’ Trevor answered.

‘That’s the one. And a final word. Bear that headless dream in mind. I don’t go a bundle on this psychic nonsense, but I do believe villains come from every class. High as well as low.’

‘The only way Andy could have possibly slept on this pier is if he flew in.’ Trevor faced the barricade of barbed wire and planks that stretched across the opening where the turnstiles had once operated.

‘I only repeated what the man said, I didn’t guarantee it,’ Peter stepped back and looked down the side of the structure that stretched out from the promenade over the sea.

Trevor walked to the top of the crumbling steps that led down to the sands. ‘Do you think there could be another way in?’

‘I think we should come back in the morning when we can see what we’re doing. We’re wasting drinking time. Buy you a pint in the White Hart,’ Peter offered.

‘It’s after twelve.’

‘That’s when the White Hart livens up. The landlord’s been around for years. He might know who owns this pile of crap. And that could save us leg work in the morning when we’re knocking on doors, trying to find out who has the key.’

‘Key? Axe more like it,’ Trevor surveyed the barricades. Peter was right. It would be stupid to try to do more by moonlight. ‘You buy?’

‘The first pint,’ Peter agreed, leading the way back to the car.

‘Daisy, are you sure that’s what you want to do?’ Judy asked.

‘I’m sure.’ Daisy had telephoned Richard that morning and told him she intended to spend the rest of the day with Judy. She’d hung up before he could protest and done exactly what she’d said she would. She’d slept a couple of hours away on Judy’s sofa although Judy would have preferred her to take her bed. And neither of them had

woken until Alan had knocked on Judy's door at the end of his shift.

'You shouldn't be alone,' Alan said, 'not now. Why don't you take a break and stay with me, Carol and the kids?'

'No. I want to get back to work, the sooner the better. And I want to move into a hospital flat.'

'You *want* this?' Judy waved her hand at the used surroundings.

'I don't think I could cope with living alone in the apartment, and I simply can't spend another day in Richard's mausoleum...' Daisy faltered. She'd used the term "mausoleum" before. The last time she'd spoken to Tim. She'd been angry with him because he'd talked about working in Richard's clinic, and she'd retaliated by calling the place a mausoleum. Was there nothing that didn't carry a reminder of that night?

'Daisy,' Judy leaned towards her, 'I know I keep saying this but you can't know for certain that Tim is dead.'

'Do you think I want Tim dead? I've thought of nothing but Tim alive, since we walked out of the mortuary. But I know,' she looked Judy in the eye. 'I know, Judy. He's dead. I don't need more proof. I'm certain that I've lost Tim. I'm alone, and it's – hard.' Cold, numb nothingness had been replaced by anger. And for the moment it was sufficient to sustain her.

She looked around the room, the furniture, the gaudy curtains that didn't match the carpet, the atmosphere of transience that went with rented accommodation; cupboards and shelves being used to store belongings that were on their way to somewhere more permanent. Was this going to be her life from now on? A solitary, single flat with no one waiting behind the door?

But even this flat of Judy's held memories. Tim had sat next to her here, a sandwich in the hand he'd rested on her shoulder, a whisky glass in the other. His head thrown back as he'd laughed at one of Alan's or Judy's jokes. Were all the flats the same? Would she ever find a place that didn't bring back memories of Tim?

'You're not alone,' Judy said forcefully.

'Yes I am.' Daisy turned a bleak, dry-eyed face to Judy. 'I'm not looking for pity or sympathy,' she said harshly, forestalling sentimentality. 'There was us, and now there's me. And I don't even know who I am any more.' She saw the look of anguish on Alan's face and softened her voice. 'I know what *we* like. I can tell you what Tim and I do in our spare time, what food we eat, how we'd furnish a room, what *our* taste is. But me,' she shrugged. 'That's quite another matter. Tim became a part of my life, a part of me, from the first moment we met. I can't remember what *I* did, where *I* went, or even who my friends were before he was there. Now I have to start again. And to be honest I can't find a reason for doing so. I don't mean that in a morbid sense. But should I continue to work here, walk the corridors, go to the canteen, drop in on the staff parties? Tim won't be there. I'll never turn a corner again and see him unexpectedly, but the reminders will be there. And they'll hurt,' she said bitterly. 'And then what happens after work? There'll be no one to wait for, no one to cook for, no joint plans to be made. I could leave the hospital but to go where? I can't think straight, let alone act decisively. I know that I have to start again,' she said finally, 'but I simply don't have the strength to do it.'

'For what it's worth, you have our friendship,' Alan said. 'And we're not offering pity. Judy and I think a lot of you, and Tim,' he added gravely. 'And we'd be honoured if you decide to lean on us until you find your strength again. And you will find it, Daisy, sooner than you think.'

‘I hope so, if only for your sake. I’m leaning rather heavily on both of you at the moment.’

‘Lean away, that’s what friends are for.’ Judy turned her mind to the immediate and the practical. ‘We’ll help you move from your apartment into one of the hospital flats tomorrow. If that’s what you want to do.’

‘It is.’

‘And I’ll do what I can to persuade administration to put you back on duty,’ Alan said.

‘Thanks, Alan. Work will give me something to do and the longer I delay going back, the worse it will be to pick up the threads again. I will stay here – in town that is – until –’ Daisy locked her fingers together and stared down at them. ‘Tim is found. As for the apartment,’ she took a deep breath. ‘I couldn’t live there without Tim. I’ll hand the keys back to Richard.’

Tomorrow stretched out in front of her. She’d be busy and, if she was lucky, the day after, administration would allow her to return to work. Life would move on, one day at a time. That’s how it would be from now on. Nothing to look forward to. No elaborate plans for the future. Just the moment.

‘It would be better if you lived in a hospital flat close to Judy than alone in the apartment,’ Alan agreed. ‘But will you be able to get a flat tomorrow?’

‘Apart from being very basic and utility they’re too close to work for comfort. Anyone who takes one has to accept that they’re on call virtually twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. There are two empty on this floor at the moment,’ Judy told him.

‘Hopefully Daisy can move into one of those.’ Alan turned to Daisy. ‘But don’t give Richard the keys to the apartment. At least, not yet. Not until Tim’s found – one way or another,’ he blurted.

‘Why not?’ Daisy asked.



‘Just don’t.’ He left the sofa. ‘And now, I’m going to drive you to Richard’s.’

‘I’d prefer to stay here tonight. Can I?’ Daisy asked Judy.

‘You’d be more than welcome, but I promised Richard when he rang half an hour ago that one of us would drive you back there.’

‘So you said. I’d forgotten,’ Daisy said.

‘There’s nothing wrong at Richard’s, is there?’ Alan asked, sensing Daisy’s reluctance.

‘No. It’s just that I’m more comfortable here,’ she replied unconvincingly.

‘I’ll come with you if you like,’ Judy offered. ‘I’m sure the butler could find me a spare mattress.’

‘No.’ Daisy found the courage to put on a brave face. She kissed Judy’s cheek. ‘It’s only for one more night. I’ll see you tomorrow.’

‘First thing, as it’s my day off.’ Judy opened the door. ‘And we’ll move you out of the apartment and Richard’s. If there’s a problem getting a flat, we’ll sort out a put-you-up here.’

‘Where’s it going?’ Alan asked. ‘In the bath?’

‘These flats have hidden spaces, and delights.’ Judy forced a smile. ‘I’ll enlighten you about them tomorrow, Daisy.’

‘Thank you.’ Daisy walked into the corridor.

Alan took her arm. ‘They’ll find Tim soon, Daisy. I promise you. This can’t go on much longer.’

Trevor felt sick as well as tired. The back room of the White Hart was filled with an overpowering smell of sweat and decay; it was also decorated in the most begrimed, nicotine-stained shade of puce he’d seen. And the beer was warm and flat. Peter had assured him it was a fine pint of real ale, but in his opinion the cloudy depths looked and

tasted like the dregs of a forensic specimen. Even the landlord, obese, with small round piggy eyes and slicked back, black greasy hair, was a parody of “mine host.”

Ben Gummer had been a fairground wrestler, and in his time, a good one, according to Peter, but sitting in Peter’s idea of a “good pub” Trevor was beginning to question his partner’s judgement. And whatever Ben Gummer had been, he’d long since gone to seed. The torn trousers, tied at what passed for a waist with string, and the ripped filthy vest left nothing of the bulky, sagging figure to the imagination.

Trevor sat opposite the landlord at the table Peter had commandeered, and watched, repulsed, yet strangely fascinated, by the sight of the fat man’s dirty white flesh wobbling in and out of the holes in his clothes.

‘Don’t allow down and outs in here, you should know that, Peter,’ Ben swallowed half his pint of beer. ‘My customers,’ he glanced at the group of seedy men around the bar, ‘aren’t exactly upper crust, but none of them are at the chewed end of a rope either.’

‘So you don’t know anything about the down and outs that sleep on the pier?’ Trevor wanted to get the police business over with quickly so he could go home. The surroundings had given his poky flat a new lustre.

‘I don’t know about the pier as it is now,’ Ben dribbled beer down his chest. ‘It’s years since I set foot on the boards, but the pier as it was – well that’s a different story.’

‘When was that Ben?’ Peter was settled, clearly at home and happy at the prospect of a night’s drinking. Irritated, Trevor recalled that they’d come in Peter’s car. Peter had the keys, and it was too far for him to walk back to his flat.

‘About ten years after the war. I did my National Service, came out of the army, and got myself a pitch on

the pier, good one too, two stalls at the far end next to the theatre. I knocked them into one and set up a wrestling booth and I raked it in. It was like scraping flies off honey. I lived well. Best suits, best food, best drink and,' he leered at Trevor, 'best women.'

Peter lifted his glass, 'You still know your way around the pier?'

'Like the back of my hand,' Ben boasted. 'The pier was over a hundred years old even then. And, according to the old pros it was run down. But I didn't see it. To me, those were golden days.'

'Who did you pay your rent to, Ben?' Trevor pushed. 'Council?'

'Not the council. Toffs owned it then. Still do if I remember right. They tried to hand it over to the town back in the seventies, but the council wouldn't have it. Place is falling apart, cost too much to put it right. But isn't that just like the bloody toffs. Bleed something dry, take the money, run like hell and leave someone else with the mess.'

'Can you remember the names of the toffs?' Trevor asked impatiently.

'Course I can,' Ben leaned over the table and dropped his voice to a whisper. 'Called themselves Lords. All airs and bloody graces, but those of us who worked the pier knew the truth. Lords or no lords they married dirt. A show girl who started off by showing more than women used to in those days. Now it's all different. You open the paper and it's spread out in front of you...'

'Who was this woman?' Peter asked.

'Her father owned the Pier and she danced with the Pierrot troop who worked the pier theatre before the war. Old George who watched the turnstile back then told me it was common knowledge that she'd give out a lot more backstage after the show, but only if you had sixpence to

spare,' he licked his wet lips. 'She'd tickle anyone's fancy, and one day she tickled a lord's and caught him – Lord, lock, stock, title, money, the lot. Like a dog after a bitch on heat, he couldn't leave her alone. Kept on coming back for more, and in the end, she wouldn't take money, marriage was what she was after, and that was what she got. Her ladyship,' he sneered. 'Common prostitute, that's all she ever was. And to think she ended up a lady. Not that her granddaughter will own up to that part of the family history.'

'You know their name?' Peter finished his beer and to Trevor's relief didn't suggest having another.

'They're the lot that owns that flash clinic on the headland,' Ben revealed triumphantly.

'The Sherringtons?' Peter stared in amazement.

'The Holbournes. Her son, Lord Holbourne, thinks he's so special. He's nothing but a high class bastard, and the likes of me and you – the workers, we're as badly off as our fathers ever were. It's not right. Liars, thieves and prostitutes, that's what that bloody toff family were, and still are for all their fancy clinic.'

He continued rambling, but Trevor and Peter stopped listening. They looked at one another, the same thought in both their minds. Joanna, Richard Sherrington's wife was a Holbourne. Her father had built the clinic that bore his name as well as Richard's. And the Holbournes owned the pier that Andy slept on, and more to the point, saw clowns on.

'Where's the tie-in?' Trevor murmured.

'Probably up another blind alley. The same one our short, fat, tall, thin, hunchback clown's sitting in.' Peter handed his glass to Trevor. 'Your round, I believe.'

## Chapter Nine

RICHARD SHERRINGHAM WOKE EARLY the next morning. He opened his curtains to a sky barely flushed by the first rays of dawn, showered, shaved and dressed and still the hands on his watch hovered before six. He closed his bedroom door quietly and walked down the gallery. The house was silent, but a strip of artificial light shone beneath the door of Joanna's room. He debated whether to knock. He'd scarcely spoken to her since her return, and, even when he had, their exchanges had been anything but civil.

He knew their estrangement was more his fault than hers. She loved Tim and she was coping with the stress of his disappearance the only way she knew how: by immersing herself in her lucrative programme of research for a cosmetic company. She'd done much the same thing after her miscarriages and his father's death, which had almost broken both of them.

His father, Theodore had introduced them. He had picked Joanna from among his most brilliant students to be his assistant, but neither her beauty nor the fact that she was the daughter of an old friend, a rich and influential British politician, had swayed Theo's choice.

Ability and ability alone had secured Lady Joanna Holbourne the post. Richard had noticed Joanna's blatant adoration of his father, and been amused by his father's indifference to her charms. Theodore Sherringham was a widower twice over, but even when his wives had been alive, he had lived for his work. And Joanna would have been treated with the same polite indifference by her guru, whether she'd been man, woman or trained ape.

Richard made frequent visits to his father's home for Tim's sake. His stepmother had died shortly after Tim's birth and his father was too immersed in his work to pay much attention to his younger son. It wasn't deliberate neglect but Richard knew from experience the effect was the same.

For one or two days every week, depending on his schedule, he'd watched Joanna flutter her eyelashes at his father across the dinner table, noted his father's indifference, and driven back to the Los Angeles hospital that had offered him an opportunity to develop his own budding surgical career.

Then, a year after Joanna had begun to work for him, Theodore Sherringham's world fell apart. His father's professional demise had been well documented by the media. He had paid twenty-five students to take part in an experiment. What the students hadn't been told, and the press never discovered, was that the experiment had been designed to test the power of a new hallucinatory drug Theo was trying to perfect.

Joanna had hired a student bar, set up a buffet, and created a party atmosphere. Quite what went wrong was never publicly divulged, but that didn't stop the television crews and papers from speculating as to what had driven fifteen of the students to jump to their deaths from the roof of the building that night.

The resulting outcry forced Theodore to close his clinic, research laboratory and the medical school he'd founded. Shattered by the scandal, he'd killed himself. And it was Richard who found him, slumped lifeless over his desk, a brain-spattered bullet embedded in the wall behind his head.

Richard was devastated by the loss of the man who had been father, mentor and friend for as long as he could remember. But worse was to follow. An army of reporters

camped outside his father's house. Tim was sent to boarding school only to be harassed by reporters there. Richard's contract was terminated by the Los Angeles hospital.

A strong police presence kept the media at a distance during Theo's funeral. Few mourners attended but Joanna had been among them. Despite her grief, she'd collected Tim from his school and helped him arrange the funeral. He'd been grateful to her, and when she'd told him she was returning to England and invited him to visit her there, he took her up on her offer.

He ordered his father's lawyers to convert all of his father's and his own assets into cash. Then he followed Joanna, taking Tim with him. Joanna's father was waiting for him. Joanna had spoken highly of both Sherringtons, father and son, and discreet enquiries into the value of the Sherrington fortune coupled with the six thousand miles distance from the scandal had enabled George to greet the son of his old friend with a very good grace.

Holbourne influence and Sherrington money secured Tim a place at one of England's best public schools, and Richard membership at three exclusive London clubs. During Richard's inaugural dinner at one of the clubs, George casually mentioned the run-down clinic he owned. Richard already realised that England offered a new life, free from the destructive tentacles of the scandal that had ruined his father. He visited the Holbourne clinic, and saw the raw material he needed to open his own, private hospital. It had the added advantage of an old, well-respected name to attract the right kind of custom.

Richard bought a half share in the Holbourne clinic, turning it into the Holbourne and Sherrington clinic. Then he set to work on its transformation. Lonely, a little lost in an alien land, Richard made tentative moves towards Joanna. And she responded. Somehow, almost without him

knowing how it had happened, he found himself married to her. One British magazine went so far as to call it the society wedding of the year. It was left to the American press to hit a sourer note.

They found a semi-derelict manor for sale within easy distance of the clinic. A barn of a place set in forty acres that bordered the sea. It had attracted occasional interest, but no buyers, for over half a century. Joanna had seen the potential and made it her project. They moved into the mansion the day the work was completed. Tim joined them for the school holidays, and they began to live the perfect life – or so Richard thought up until the day Joanna lost their child.

He hadn't been able to console her – and now – after Tim's disappearance – she had shut him out even further.

Richard tapped Joanna's door lightly, and waited. When there was no response he walked away.

He paused outside Daisy's door and listened. All was quiet. Assuming she still slept, he walked down the staircase. The full length oil painting that had been his wedding present to Joanna dominated the impressive entrance hall. Her slim figure stood outlined against a background of summer greenery. She was wearing a plain white dress, her blue eyes free and untroubled.

He looked at it for a moment. Joanna was the perfect wife, the perfect hostess, intelligent, witty, charming. For years she'd stage-managed the cocktail and dinner parties that had proved so conducive to his financial and business dealings. But Joanna's even temper and placidity had never excited any strong passions within him, not like – a rare smile lit his face as an image floated into his mind of his mistress. Loving, undemanding – and raunchy – she could match her mood to his, by sensing the atmosphere he carried with him. His life would be so different if he was with her – permanently.



Plagued by guilt he turned away from the portrait and wrenched open the front door. Perhaps he should consider divorcing Joanna and not only for selfish reasons. She must sense he didn't love her as whole-heartedly as a husband should.

And Tim? No matter how he tried to stop thinking about his brother, there was the pain of knowing that something had happened to him. After their father had died, Tim had meant more to him than any other being and much, much more than Joanna. And it wasn't simply because Tim was the only family he had left. Tim had become friend, brother, and to a certain extent the son he'd never had.

As soon as Tim came back he would make plans for himself, Tim and his mistress. But not Joanna.

He'd take care of her. And now that his social and financial positions were unassailable, that side of things would prove easy to manage. There was such a thing as civilised divorce. Her father, George, might prove difficult – the Holbournes still owned forty percent of the clinic, but they had no real interest in the day to day running of the place. He would buy George out. If he made an offer soon, while he was still with Joanna, he'd have no reason not to take it.

He walked to the garage. Yesterday – he preferred to forget yesterday. The headless body in the evening shirt and trousers that hadn't been Tim. Tim lived. He had to keep believing it. He had no reason not to. He'd paid the ransom they'd demanded. Followed the whispered instructions on his private phone to the letter. Sooner or later there'd be a call. And Tim – alive.

He'd buy out George give Tim half the clinic and divorce Joanna. She'd find someone else. Someone better for her than him. It might be difficult at first to get her to

see things his way, but nothing should arise that money couldn't resolve.

The house might prove awkward. It was in their joint names, and Joanna would probably want to continue living in it, but it was useful for entertaining.

He mulled over the problems. The idea of divorcing Joanna and making a new start appealed to him. He played with the concept, building clean new castles in the air. And when Tim returned, he'd insist his brother leave the General and join the staff at the clinic. No more playing with socialist ideals. He hadn't schemed and worked for over twenty years to stand by and watch his brother – his only brother for Christ's sake, work himself to shreds for pocket money. Daisy would have to learn that Tim was destined for greater things, and she could either keep up or be left behind.

His Bentley started at the first turn of the key. It purred out of the garage and down the drive. He activated the gates with the remote controlled switch in the car and turned out on to the secondary road that skirted the headland.

He started to plan out the next few days. He'd abandoned his lecture tour of the States, but that was no reason to waste the next four weeks. He'd arrange an immediate theatre list for the clinic. Tony Pierce might be in the depths of Arabia, but there were other anaesthetists. There was that chap Tim had insisted on inviting to the last party. The one who worked in the general hospital – Edmunds – Mike Edmunds, that was it.

Once a decent salary was waved under his nose, he'd leave the General just as Tony had. And when Tony returned, he could rent out the second theatre complete with anaesthetist. Run the two at full capacity. Keep Edmunds on to serve the Harley Street surgeons who paid dearly for the privilege of using the clinic's facilities.

Expansion, that was his plan, particularly after Tim came in with him. Tim was a first-class surgeon, and once Tim was in, Daisy would follow. Alice Palmer-Smith had told him she had the makings of a good doctor and capable surgeon.

He turned up the broad, cherry-tree bordered driveway to the clinic. He stopped halfway and turned off his engine. The towers of the clinic rose, tall, gleaming with the reflected light of the sunrise. It was a fine building that housed one of the best equipped medical complexes in Europe. He had every right to be proud of it. It was his. His brainchild.

If the place had been left to the care of the Holbournes, it would still be housed in the Victorian villa that now served as a staff hostel. George's ideas of medicine were forty years out of date. The Holbourne clinic, as opposed to the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic, had consisted of private rooms, sympathetically trained nurses and a sedative-laden drugs trolley.

The new buildings, the modern equipment, the annexes for specialised therapy – facilities that top doctors queued to use, were the result of his vision and planning. But since his hopes for the clinic had been realised, he'd allowed himself to grow complacent. He'd thought there was nothing more to strive for. But now he had Tim to find, and persuade into partnership. He had no intention of losing his brother a second time.

He'd build a new wing and theatre to house the additional patients, and a suite of consultation rooms adjoining his own. A house for Tim and Daisy on the lower cliff face, Canadian style, split-level. Far enough away to ensure privacy but close enough to be counted an advantage to the clinic. If his divorce worked out, he might even consider building one for himself. There was more than enough land.

He drove on, the pain generated by Tim's disappearance momentarily anaesthetised by the vision of medical utopia that rose in his mind's eye. He had the land, the money. The political climate had generated unlimited work and people who could afford his fees. Why shouldn't he expand? Create a luxurious present and secure future for Tim, as he had done for himself?

'It's eight-thirty.' Trevor peered through the half-open door into Peter's flat.

'I won't tell if you won't.' Peter opened the door wide enough for Trevor to walk in, then slammed it noisily.

'So this is home.' Trevor stared at the basic furniture and cord carpet universal to cheap rented accommodation. The flat was clean and uncluttered, which was more than could be said for his place. But it also had about as much personality as a second-hand furniture showroom.

'The only things I'll answer for are in the wardrobe and the food cupboard,' Peter rubbed his hands vigorously in his short hair, spiking it. 'And that's the way I like it.' He opened his sleep-ridden eyes wide enough to glare at Trevor.

'Something you won't like is Mulcahy's reaction when he finds out we've been slacking.'

'We didn't leave the White Hart until four.'

'That wasn't all work.'

'We dug up a couple of leads didn't we? In my book that's work.' Peter stared at Trevor for a moment, then realising further sleep, though desirable, was a day away, he untied the belt on his dressing gown and walked into the bedroom to dress. 'Make us some coffee,' he shouted over his shoulder, 'you'll find everything you need in the kitchen.'

A door to Trevor's left led into a tiny, spotless galley kitchen. The only items on the work surface were a small

electric grinder and a filter coffee machine, both obviously new. He opened the cupboard above them and found a jar labelled coffee beans. If it had been his place the jar would have contained coupons and elastic bands, as it was it held rich, dark, shiny beans.

He ground the beans and reflected how little he knew Peter. He'd worked with him for more than five years, on occasion twenty or more hours a day. They ate together – when they had time, and generally worked well together, in spite of the more glaring differences between them, but they rarely met outside working hours. And if anyone had asked him what Peter was like, the last words he would have included in his list of adjectives were “organised” and “domesticated”, yet both clearly applied.

‘Judging by the smell, you found everything.’ Peter walked in barefoot, trousers on, shirt flapping, rubbing a towel over his scalp.

‘Couldn’t fail, tidy place you have.’

‘It’s the way a kitchen should be.’ Peter pulled two cups and saucers out of one of the cupboards. ‘No clutter. Nothing that isn’t essential. You wouldn’t believe the crap Wendy used to dot around the house. No need for any of it. Stuff standing around just waiting to be dusted.’

‘Do your own cleaning?’ Trevor wanted to get off the topic of Wendy before Peter went into one of his tirades against his ex-wife.

‘I keep it tidy but I pay a woman down the hall to come in a couple of times a week to give the place a going over.’ Peter poured two coffees. ‘Milk and sugar?’

Trevor nodded and Peter handed down dried milk and sugar from the top cupboard.

‘No hangover after last night?’ Peter asked.

‘I couldn’t drink that muck.’

‘No taste, that’s your problem.’

‘I went to the shelter early this morning.’ Trevor perched on a stool.

‘It’s before nine now. What do you call morning?’

‘Seven. I saw Sam Mayberry, he said he hasn’t seen Andy in weeks but he’d heard rumours of the pier being used by down and outs and he does know a clown. An old chap known as Gramps. Apparently, he claims he was once a professional singer-comedian and a member of the last troupe of Pierrots who worked the pier, back in the late sixties.’

‘And now he haunts motorways.’ Peter buttoned his shirt.

‘Limps along them more like it. He’s frail, over seventy and has a wooden leg.’

‘An ideal murder suspect. Did you talk to him?’

‘For what it was worth. He was in one of the dormitories at the shelter, his leg hanging on the post at the end of the bed. Out for the count. Too far gone to remember who he was, let alone talk. Sam said he’d keep him there for us until this afternoon.’

‘So we start with the Sherringtons.’

‘You start with the Sherringtons,’ Trevor finished his coffee and rinsed his cup under the running tap. ‘I’ve already started, remember.’

Hare, the epitome of the well trained English butler, from the tips of his gleaming black shoes to the top of his well-brushed, balding, grey head, opened the door, and listened politely as Peter spoke.

‘Dr Richard Sherrington is in the clinic. Her ladyship is breakfasting on the terrace with Dr Edmunds, and Dr Daisy is still asleep,’ he informed them in reply to Peter’s enquiry. ‘If it’s absolutely necessary I could wake Dr Daisy.’

‘Please don’t,’ Trevor replied.

‘Perhaps we could speak to her ladyship.’ Peter almost choked on the title.

‘If you’d follow me, officers,’

They walked behind Hare through the galleried hall, into the drawing room and out on to the back terrace.

‘These gentlemen are with the police, Lady Joanna,’ Hare announced.

‘Sergeant Collins and Joseph,’ Peter introduced them.

‘Is there any news of Tim?’ Joanna was pale, but calm.

‘None I’m afraid, but we’d like to ask you a few questions,’ Trevor replied.

‘Please, sit down,’ she indicated the vacant chairs at the table. ‘Bring some more coffee and two extra cups please, Hare.’

‘Yes, your Ladyship.’

‘Some place you have here,’ Peter looked at the stone cupids on the fountain that splashed tranquilly in the centre of the terrace.

‘We like it, and it suits us.’ Joanna turned to her companion. ‘This is Dr Edmunds, he is thinking of joining the staff at my husband’s clinic.’

‘Dr Edmunds,’ Trevor extended his hand.

‘Mike.’ He wiped the marmalade from his fingers in a napkin, before shaking Trevor’s hand.

‘How can we help you, Sergeants?’ Joanna asked.

‘We’re part of the team investigating the disappearance of Tim Sherringham,’ Trevor took the seat Joanna offered. ‘And we’d like to ask you about the party you and your husband gave that night.’

‘I know Tim disappeared that night, but nothing out of the ordinary happened at that party, Sergeant.’

‘If you’d let us be the judge of that.’ Peter slipped into his professional manner.

‘Where would you like me to begin?’ Joanna moved slightly to allow Hare to set a tray of coffee on the table.

Trevor smiled in an attempt to lighten the atmosphere Peter had generated. ‘What time did the party begin?’

‘Seven-thirty for eight. Most of the guests had arrived by seven-forty-five. Except Tim and Daisy, they’re invariably late. They work such long hours at the General.’

‘I can vouch for that,’ Mike chipped in.

Peter took the cup Joanna handed him. ‘Do you often give dinner parties?’

‘We entertain no more frequently than my husband’s position demands. We receive many invitations to dinners, balls, official openings – you know the sort of thing, and etiquette demands we reciprocate.’

‘Reciprocate, or provide a platform from which to do business?’

‘My husband frequently mixes business with pleasure, Sergeant Collins. It’s more civilised to discuss work over coffee and brandy after a fine meal than in a dreary office.’

‘From what I see,’ Peter looked pointedly up at the house, ‘and what I’ve heard, your husband doesn’t need to bring his work home.’

‘What you see, Sergeant, is a substantial proportion of my husband’s assets, and as to what you’ve heard, surely I don’t need to tell someone in your profession that people in general, and the press in particular, are prone to exaggeration?’

‘What did Tim and Daisy Sherringham do when they arrived here?’ Trevor steered the conversation back on course.

‘Drank champagne, circulated and talked. That is the general purpose of a dinner party.’

‘Who did they talk to?’



‘Not that many people before dinner. As I’ve explained, they didn’t arrive until just before it was served.’

‘What time was that?’

‘Eight-fifteen.’

‘Did you talk to either Tim or Daisy that evening?’

‘Naturally, I was the hostess. Tim sat on my right; Daisy was a little lower down the table.’

‘Who decided the placings?’

‘I did. Richard often uses Tim as an extra host at our parties. He converses well with all kinds of people.’

‘Was Daisy annoyed by their separation?’

‘I wouldn’t have thought so. It isn’t usual for husbands and wives to sit next to one another.’

‘Did anything happen during the meal?’ Peter pressed.

‘We ate.’

‘What?’

‘Sergeant Collins, do you really expect to find clues to Tim’s disappearance in the menu?’

‘May I remind you of the seriousness...’

‘You don’t have to remind me of anything, Sergeant,’ Joanna interrupted coolly. ‘I’m close to Tim and I want to find him as much as Daisy and Richard. I simply fail to see what possible connection there could be between Tim’s sudden disappearance and the menu for that evening.’

‘Lady Joanna,’ Trevor flashed a quick warning glance at Peter. ‘I’ll be honest with you. At this moment we have no firm evidence, and the little we do know doesn’t make sense. We’re not in a position to even hazard a guess as to what has happened to Tim Sherringham. A detailed account of your party would be a start. A point we can work from. We need to know who saw Tim that night, who spoke to him, made plans with him. Please? Tell us what you know. It may seem trivial to you, but it could give us the break we’re looking for.’

‘Snail’s caviar canapés, broiled salmon, chateaufort of pigeons, roast capon, potatoes a la duchesse, bread sauce, puff potatoes, asparagus au gratin, French lettuce salad, strawberry mousse, cheese soufflé, and coffee.’ Mike looked at Peter. ‘You wanted the menu.’

‘You were at the party?’

‘I was.’

‘Do you make a habit of memorising the menus of dinner parties you’ve attended?’ Peter asked.

‘Not always. Most are forgettable. This I remembered because Richard mentioned that Joanna had found it in an old Edwardian cookery book. I believe the snail’s caviar to be the only concession to modernity.’

‘It was,’ Joanna agreed.

‘What did Tim talk about over dinner?’ Trevor directed the question at Joanna, but Mike answered.

‘The last trip he and Daisy had taken to Cornwall. They’d sailed down to Falmouth, and anchored in Helford Creek. Tim loved the place. He said if he had enough money he’d buy a cottage down there that bordered the river.’

‘Surely Tim Sherringham could have bought any house he wanted,’ Peter said.

‘Apart from a modest inheritance from his father, Tim and Daisy only have their salaries, and doctors who work for the NHS don’t earn fortunes,’ Joanna informed Peter caustically.

‘I’ll say they don’t,’ Mike concurred.

‘Tim Sherringham owns a Mercedes, lives in an expensive apartment...’

‘Wedding gifts from Richard and me, but we gave Tim no money. And just before the wedding Tim told me that he and Daisy had taken out a bank loan to buy their yacht. If they were as well off as you’d like to believe, I think they would have bought the yacht outright.’

‘So apart from the expensive gifts you and your husband gave him, Tim Sherringham lived the life of a working doctor?’

‘Yes, Sergeant Collins.’

‘Most certainly,’ Mike added emphatically.

‘How come one brother has all this?’ Peter waved at the house, ‘and the other has to exist on his salary?’

‘My husband owns his own clinic, Sergeant Collins. Tim works for the NHS.’

‘It’s as simple as that?’ Peter raised his eyebrows.

‘As simple as that,’ Joanna reiterated.

‘Nothing to do with your husband inheriting the Sherringham family wealth, and Tim inheriting nothing?’ Peter suddenly realised he knew nothing about the Sherringhams other than they had come to the UK from the States.

‘Richard’s father’s will stipulated that his assets be split equally between them. Tim’s half was placed in gilt-edged securities until he came of age. Richard spent every penny of his and more, buying this place. At the time no one could have foreseen that property prices would escalate beyond all reason.’

‘Did your husband buy this house before you married?’

‘No, we bought it after, and it didn’t look like this when we acquired it. It was a shell. We renovated it, using whatever money we could lay our hands on, including a small inheritance from my aunt.’ Joanna was clearly irritated by Peter’s obsession with the family’s finances.

‘So where did Richard Sherringham live when he met you?’

‘A house,’ Joanna paused just long enough to annoy Peter. ‘In California. He and Tim came here for a holiday after his father’s death. Did you know that his father and mine were old friends?’

‘No.’

‘To cut a long story short he decided to stay in England, and my father offered him a half share in the clinic...’

‘Offered?’ Peter looked inquisitively at her.

‘Sold,’ she corrected. ‘And knowing my father, he made sure that Richard paid top market price.’

‘And Richard Sherringham had the means to pay and enough left over to buy this place?’

‘My husband was a practising doctor in America and a wealthy man in his own right when I met him. He had more than just his father’s inheritance. I, on the other hand, was anything but well-heeled.’

‘You’ve just said that your father sold Richard a half share in the clinic.’

‘My father isn’t me, Sergeant, and he has old-fashioned ideas on bringing up children. I received everything I asked for until the day my education finished. After that I found myself on my own. I’m not saying he threw me out, but he didn’t give me any money either. I was expected to go out and earn my keep, which I did. I took a job as Richard’s father’s assistant on a medical research project in the States and that is how I met Richard.’

‘Why did your husband buy his way into the Holbourne clinic? Surely a doctor of his standing could have opened his own place?’ Peter asked.

‘I’ve no idea,’ Joanna topped up her coffee cup but didn’t offer the coffee pot to anyone else.

‘Was it your influence?’ Trevor ventured.

‘I doubt it; he bought a share in the clinic before we got engaged. Perhaps you’d like to ask him yourself?’ She made it clear it was one question too many – and too personal. ‘You say you want to find Tim but all you seem to be doing is prying into my family’s finances, Sergeants.’

And, as I fail to see how the information you want could possibly help you to find my brother-in-law, I suggest you leave before I ask Hare to show you the door.'

## Chapter Ten

‘PLEASE, LADY JOANNA,’ AS usual it was left to Trevor to be the peacemaker. ‘We’re trying to establish a reason for your brother-in-law’s disappearance. People would see all this,’ he indicated the house and gardens, ‘and assume that you are wealthy enough to pay a substantial ransom for his safe return,’ he added, citing Bill’s theory.

‘I see.’ She looked keenly at him but didn’t seem surprised. ‘A ransom demand has been made?’

‘Not that we are aware of – yet. But that is not to say one hasn’t been made. Kidnappers invariably warn the victim’s family not to contact the police.’

‘But my husband has contacted you, Sergeant Joseph,’ she reminded him.

‘Please, just a few more questions,’ Trevor begged. ‘Can we go back to the night of the party?’ He pulled out his notebook and laid it on the table. ‘Did Tim Sherringham talk about anything other than his holiday in Cornwall, and wanting to buy a house down there?’

Mike scratched his nose thoughtfully. ‘He talked about nuclear threats and disasters, the state of the NHS, Tony Pierce’s forthcoming trip to Arabia...’

‘Who’s Tony Pierce?’ Trevor interrupted.

‘Richard’s anaesthetist. He used to work in the General with Tim and Daisy before my husband enticed him into working at his clinic.’

‘He’s a damned good anaesthetist too,’ Mike commented.

‘And Tim Sherringham talked to him?’ Trevor looked at Mike.

‘After dinner a few of us, including Tony, escaped into the billiards room.’

‘And now he’s in Arabia?’ Trevor noted the name.

‘The party that night was something of a Bon Voyage affair,’ Joanna explained coldly. ‘Richard was leaving the next morning for a lecture tour of the States. My father and I were going to Italy to holiday in the family villa. Richard intended to stay in the States for at least six weeks. If things had gone well, possibly longer. It was the perfect time for Tony to take a holiday.’

‘An anaesthetist has no work without a surgeon,’ Mike chipped in, ‘and Tony’s always admired Lawrence of Arabia. He’s re-tracing Lawrence’s footsteps. I only hope the trip’s living up to his expectations.’

‘No holiday for Tim and Daisy Sherringham?’ Trevor asked.

‘Tim and Daisy took four weeks out, for their honeymoon six months ago. I invited them to the villa in Italy, but they had very little holiday entitlement left.’

‘So, you ate, talked about various trivia, then what?’ Trevor sat back in his chair and eyed Mike, feeling he’d get more out of him than Joanna after her outburst.

‘We left the dinner table and mingled for a while. Tim mislaid Daisy, he looked for her without success, then we broke away from the main party and hid in the billiards room.’

‘We being Tim Sherringham, you, and Tony Pierce?’ Trevor’s pencil hovered over his notebook.

‘That’s right.’

‘Did you find out what had happened to Daisy Sherringham?’ Peter asked.

‘Not really. We left the billiards room around one o’clock. By then Daisy was none too happy. Apparently she’d been conned into spending the greater part of the evening with one of Richard’s less sensitive Conservative

guests. Daisy's politics are left-wing Socialist to Communist. As you can imagine, she didn't have a fun time.'

'She was angry with Tim when you came out of the billiards room?'

'I'd say she was more relieved than angry. If Daisy and Tim quarrel I've never seen any evidence of it.'

'Who did Tim talk to before you went into the billiards room?'

'Anybody. Everybody. He's a sociable guy,' Mike said easily. 'No one in particular comes to mind and as far as I can remember the standard of conversation was anything but scintillating. It ran along the lines of "how nice to see you again", "wasn't the dinner perfect" – which it was, and "do you work in the clinic with Richard?" Do you want me to continue my recollections of the chit-chat?'

'That won't be necessary,' Peter barked gruffly.

'What happened in the billiards room?' Trevor asked.

'We played billiards.' Much to Peter's annoyance, Mike, like Joanna, punctuated his reply with a slight, yet perceptible, pause. 'Tim was on form, he beat us all hollow, but there's nothing unusual in that. He even had the gall to complain of a headache while he was doing it. I had to get another bottle of whisky to help cure the one he gave me.'

'Did Tim Sherringham leave the billiards room at all after you started playing?' Trevor looked up from the notes he was making.

'No.'

'And you talked about the NHS and Tony Pierce's trip to Arabia?'

'We made a lot of inane jokes, and general chit-chat,' Mike answered impatiently.

'What exactly was said about the NHS?' Peter asked.



‘What is there to say? The whole system’s disintegrating. Every doctor knows it, including Richard. He might work in a private clinic but he knows the facts and he joined in the conversation when he briefly called into the billiards room to make sure we had everything we needed. There are waiting lists that people can, and do, die on – outdated outmoded equipment that’s not repaired or replaced when it breaks down. Cutbacks –’

‘Don’t you read the papers, Sergeant Collins?’ Joanna interrupted cuttingly.

‘Nothing on a more personal basis. About Tim or his job?’ Peter ignored her remark.

‘Not really. Tony grumbled about his patients. As I said, Richard came in, but he only stayed a few minutes. He asked Tim to leave the hospital and work in his clinic...’

‘And they quarrelled.’ Peter grasped at the revelation.

‘No, they didn’t quarrel, Sergeant.’

‘I have never seen my husband and his brother quarrel.’ Joanna stacked Peter’s and Trevor’s empty cups on the tray. ‘In order to understand the significance of Richard’s offer of a job to Tim, you have to understand the situation between them. Richard’s been trying to get Tim to work in his clinic since the day Tim qualified, without success. It’s become a family joke.’

‘Tim’s a good doctor and he’s perfectly happy where he is,’ Mike emphasised. ‘Not many get to be registrar at his age.’

‘Daisy wouldn’t dream of leaving the Health Service to work in private practice, no matter what the incentives in pay or conditions. And where Daisy goes, Tim goes. My husband knows full well he’s casting the proverbial pearls before swine whenever he offers Tim a job, but he can’t help getting a dig in now and again. It’s good-natured brotherly love.’

'Is there anything else either of you can recall about that evening? Any other person who spoke to Tim? Any piece of information?' Trevor persisted.

'No. Tim and Daisy left around one – one-thirty. Tony Pierce, Richard and I played billiards until about three or four o'clock,' Mike hazarded a guess.

'I went to bed around two,' Joanna added.

'You mentioned that Daisy Sherringham disappeared during the early part of the evening. Could she have spent that time with another man?' Peter asked.

'That's ludicrous,' Joanna dismissed the suggestion with a wave of her well manicured hand.

'Daisy and Tim have only been married for six months. They're incredibly happy. Or rather they were until this happened. Have you quite finished looking for things that aren't there, Sergeant Collins?' Mike glared furiously at him.

Trevor pocketed his notebook. 'As I said earlier we have a few leads, but they don't make much sense as yet. If you bear with us for a while longer we might be able to make some headway. I apologise if my questions seem strange.'

'Strange I can cope with, slanderous I find objectionable,' Joanna replied.

Trevor fiddled with his pencil. 'Does your father still own the pier?'

'I believe so.'

'I know it might seem an odd thing to ask, but would you mind explaining how your family came to own it?'

'My father's mother was a Mudesly, Maud Mudesly. My grandfather fell in love with her after seeing her in a show at the pier theatre. She worked as a Pierrette in her father's concert party, Mudesly's Merry Moppets. It was her grandfather, Michael Mudesly, who built the pier; her father Malcolm followed his father into show business.

When Malcolm Mudesly died he left the pier to my grandmother who was his only child. She rented the pier to one of her father's friends. I've often heard my father speak disparagingly of that part of his inheritance. He tried to demolish the pier a few years back, but a preservation order was slapped on it as a result of campaigning by some Victorian architectural society or other. So, too costly to repair, and too valuable to pull down, it has, as you can see if you go to the beach, been left to rot.'

'Can you remember your grandmother?'

'No, she died before I was born. My father and my aunts have told me stories about her. She must have been quite a girl in her day. Family history,' she looked at Trevor, 'it's all very interesting, but do you mind telling me where this is leading?'

'I'm afraid I can't tell you very much. Only that a down and out thinks he's seen a Pierrot on the pier.'

'Brave man to go near the place. From what I've seen, the pier looks as though it's likely to fall into the sea at any moment.'

'Does anyone here have a key to the pier?' Peter asked.

'Key?' Joanna laughed. 'Have you seen the pier, Sergeant? My father called in army advisors when he erected those barricades. The last thing a Cabinet Minister needs is an action for damages over dangerous property. If you want to look around the pier you'll need a bulldozer, not a key.'

'Then there's no easy way on to the pier?'

'None that I'm aware of.'

'Your family doesn't use the pier for anything?'

'Really, Sergeant Collins, how many times do I have to tell you? The place is nothing more than a derelict, dangerous, encumbrance'

‘A Pierrot was also seen flagging cars down on the motorway, the night Tim disappeared.’

‘I see.’

‘What do you see, Mrs Sherringham?’ Peter couldn’t bring himself to address her as “Lady”.

‘The connection you’ve made between the pier and Tim’s disappearance...’

A blood curdling scream echoed from inside the house.

Joanna and Mike were out of their chairs and half way through the drawing room in an instant. Trevor rushed into the hall in time to see Joanna leading the way along the gallery. She burst open the door of one of the bedrooms, Mike close on her heels. Taking the stairs two at a time Trevor and Peter went after them. When they reached the bedroom door, they saw Joanna and Mike standing in the room; Judy Osbourne was sitting on Daisy’s bed, Hare at her side. She was whispering words of comfort that were having no effect on the violent spasms that jerked through Daisy’s body.

‘A nightmare,’ Judy explained quietly to Joanna and Mike, as Trevor and Peter ran into the room. ‘I’m afraid I disturbed her when Hare let me in.’

‘The same headless dream as before?’ Peter enquired bluntly.

‘Daisy is in no state to be interrogated,’ Judy said angrily.

Daisy stared blankly at the three men in the doorway, then, slowly, recognition dawned in her eyes. She tensed her muscles and made a supreme effort to regain control. Trevor found it unbearable to watch.

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten anyone,’ she whispered.

‘What did you see?’ Peter pushed past Mike.

‘It was a nightmare. Nothing more,’ she continued in a remote voice.

Joanna glared at Trevor. He took the hint and set his hand on Peter’s shoulder. ‘We have to go.’ He took one last look at Daisy before he left the room. Tears were falling from her eyes. No sobs. No sounds. Just tragic, pathetic, silent tears.

Joanna held open the door. ‘Hare will see you out.’

Trevor walked out on to the gallery. Peter trailed behind him, but not before he’d looked round the bedroom. His mind worked feverishly, assimilating the information he gleaned. The closed suitcases standing in a neat square at the foot of the bed. The open wardrobe doors, revealing empty shelves and rails. The black tailored suit draped over the chair next to the bed.

‘If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen, I must get Judy’s doctor’s bag out of her car.’ Mike overtook Peter and Trevor on the staircase.

‘Just one more thing.’

Mike halted in the hall. ‘As you can see, Sergeant Collins...’

‘Why were you here this morning?’

‘Tony Pierce helped Joanna with her research when he wasn’t assisting Richard. She asked me if I’d do the same. We were discussing salary and hours to be worked. Now if you’ll excuse me, Hare will show you out.’

‘We’ll find our own way.’

Hare overtook them before they reached the front door.

‘Gentlemen,’ he opened the doors for them.

Trevor walked on, but Peter stood on the step for a moment and surveyed the immaculately manicured lawns and gardens. He looked left towards the stables, then right to where the swimming pool was only just visible through the trees.

He stepped down and turned his head to look up at the house. 'Tell you what Joseph, despite what the lady says, you don't come by a goody like this by honest graft. I think digging's called for here. Deep digging. And what's the betting we'll find something rotten at the core?'

Alan Cummins responded swiftly to Mike's call. He delayed only as long as it took him to dump his morning's work load into Eric Hedley's unwilling lap. He'd been gone about an hour when the call came through. Eric excused himself to the mother and toddler sitting in Alan's consulting room and picked up the receiver.

'Eric Hedley.' He willed it to be the voice of officialdom enquiring after Alan.

'Patrick O'Kelly, put me through to Alan.'

Eric swivelled his chair away from the patient and lowered his voice.

'He's not available. Can I take a message?'

'Get him to call me as soon as he comes in.'

'Does it concern Tim Sherringham?'

'Just pass on the message.' The line went dead. Eric bit his lip thoughtfully, then he turned back to face the woman and the child.

'Now about this heart murmur...'

'She'll sleep for a couple of hours.' Alan crumpled the syringe he'd used on Daisy and threw it into his case. Judy slid from the side of Daisy's bed on to the floor. She was drained, emotionally as well as physically. Less than an hour had passed between Mike's call and Alan's arrival, but each minute had lasted an eternity. She'd tried to deal coolly and calmly with Daisy's initial detached disorientation but it had led to an outburst of screaming hysteria that had terrified her. Despite Mike and Joanna's presence and support, she'd begun to find herself sucked

into Daisy's nightmare world of headless bodies and walking corpses.

'You could have given her that shot,' there was a hint of accusation in Alan's voice.

'I was waiting for the pills to take effect.'

'In a situation like that pills are useless.'

'I'm only a houseman. Daisy's my friend...'

'You can't blame Judy for not thinking straight.' Mike's voice sounded loud, odd in the silence that had fallen over the room now Daisy was finally quiet. 'Daisy's ravings were enough to terrify anyone.'

'She needs expert help,' Alan diagnosed. 'And not from a paediatrician either. If I had my way she'd be on her way to the General right now.'

'To the psychiatric ward?' Joanna sneered.

'To one of the single rooms that are kept for staff emergencies. Working for the NHS does have a few perks, not many. But reasonable medical care is one. If Daisy was capable of making a rational decision, I know she'd agree with me. Would Richard allow her to go to the General?'

'He'd want her in his clinic,' Joanna said.

'She'd hate that,' Alan snapped his case shut. 'Why did you allow Mike to call me and not Richard?' he asked tactlessly.

'Because Richard's not thinking straight. He's not like this,' Joanna pointed to Daisy, 'but he's irrational, aggressive. Totally unlike his normal self.'

'Well, someone has to take responsibility for Daisy,' Alan said forcefully. 'And I'd be only too happy to.'

'I'd be only too happy to let you,' Joanna agreed.

'The question is will Richard let me?'

'If you move Daisy to the General, I'll tell Richard about her relapse this evening when he comes home. By then her condition should have stabilised, one way or the other, and we'll be better placed to make decisions.'

Joanna said decisively. 'As you said. It would be what Daisy would want for herself.'

'And Richard?' Judy asked.

'I can handle Richard,' Joanna said confidently.

'Then let's move her, right now.' Judy fished her telephone from her pocket and dialled the ambulance service. 'Do you think Daisy will be calmer when she comes around?'

'She's exhausted, but I don't know enough to diagnose whether this outburst is the onset of a full breakdown or just the result of strain, coupled with lack of sleep. Obviously these nightmares don't help. But this is the worst I've seen.'

'Have there been signs she's been building up to this?' Alan asked Joanna.

'Nothing obvious I picked up on. But I haven't been looking. It's years since I've practised psychiatry.'

'They're on their way.' Judy switched off her mobile. 'Daisy had planned to go back to work and move into a hospital flat.'

'Work's out of the question for the moment.' Alan glanced at his watch. 'I'm sorry, I dare not stay longer. Eric Hedley's taken over my clinic and he'd be only too delighted to drop me in it. If any one in Admin discovers that I left the hospital, my head will be for the chop...' he squirmed with embarrassment when he recalled Daisy's nightmare and the headless corpse in the mortuary.

Judy handed him one of Daisy's suitcases. 'Leave this in the hall on your way out. I'll take it when I go with her in the ambulance.'

'I hate mortuaries,' Trevor muttered.

'I know you do,' Peter said flatly.

'Then why did I have to come here?' Trevor turned pale when he breathed in a whiff of formaldehyde.



‘Because Bill asked us to.’

‘Next time you come by yourself.’

‘Quit moaning.’ Peter pushed Trevor through the double doors.

The headless corpse was laid out on the dissecting slab. Patrick O’Kelly, watched by the Home Office pathologist, made the initial incision. He struck just as Trevor walked through the door. It was well timed. Too well timed, Peter decided, knowing the tricks pathologists played on police officers.

Trevor stared down at the headless, handleless corpse. He watched, mesmerised as Patrick pulled back the blackened flaps of skin, fat, and decaying muscle. Delving deep, Patrick continued to probe, pushing aside slimy rubbery intestines. Trevor coped with the sight better than he’d expected. It was the smell that finished him. Once the warm, heady, meaty, stink of corpse hit his nostrils, he vomited, barely managing to turn his face to the wall.

‘Sorry about my colleague,’ Peter apologised as Trevor, still retching, ran for the door.

‘We’re used to it,’ Patrick O’Kelly murmured laconically. ‘Paul,’ he shouted to his assistant. ‘Mess needs clearing.’

‘You’ve come to check out the identification?’ the Home Office pathologist enquired briskly.

‘Identification?’

‘Haven’t you heard?’ Patrick asked. A nurse from the hostel went missing a couple of days ago, Amanda Dart. One of your lot made enquiries. She was last seen wearing a brown raincoat, just like that one.’ He pointed to the array of clothes and limb segments laid out on the slab behind him. ‘Your man added up two and two and came up with the right answer. As long as you don’t touch, you can help yourself to the details.’

‘Thanks.’ Peter studied the mutilated body. He could have kicked himself for not seeing it before. Thin, small frame, stick insect legs and arms – he’d questioned the girl, given the timing, probably on the same day she’d been murdered.

‘I still think we should be grilling Daisy Sherringham not prancing around down here,’ Peter grunted as he swerved his car into the cul-de-sac of decaying Edwardian houses that hid, among other obscenities, the fetid town shelter for the homeless.

‘Give over, Peter,’ Trevor snapped with uncharacteristic vigour. His bout of nausea had left him irritable. ‘Daisy Sherringham was in one hell of a state this morning. What makes you think she’ll have recovered by now?’

‘She may have. And before you start molly-coddling the lady of your dreams, you should remember what Bill said. “Villains come from high as well as low places.”’

‘For pity’s sake she’s at the end of her tether. Anyone with eyes in their head can see that. Damn it all, she’s no more capable of murder than a...’

‘What? Have you considered the possibility that the murders might be why she’s cracking? She doesn’t like what she’s done, and going barmy is the result.’

‘If anyone’s barmy, it’s you for even thinking that.’

‘When you try, you can be a good copper, Joseph, but you’re not thinking straight on this one.’ Peter jerked the keys out of the ignition. ‘Well I am, and unlike you I’m not carrying a torch for the lady. I haven’t a clue, *yet*.’ All I know is, the deeper I dig, the more Sherringtons I come up with, and they’re not smelling all that sweet. And now, when everything I know tells me I ought to be taking Daisy Sherringham in for questioning, I find myself sitting outside this dump to see a geriatric with a wooden leg who

worked as a clown on the pier forty years ago. You're soft in the head if you think this is going to lead to anything. You're not making sense. And believe you me, Joseph; if you go down for the chop on this case, you go alone. You're not taking me with you.'

'What possible grounds would you have for questioning Daisy Sherringham?' Trevor demanded.

'The description she gave of a headless corpse before we found one.'

'The corpse isn't Tim Sherringham.'

'The rumours that something was going on between Amanda Dart and Tim Sherringham.'

'We can't be sure she heard them.'

'That hospital is a hotbed of scandal,' Peter sneered. 'In my book there's a connection between those rumours and Amanda Dart's murder. I believe Daisy Sherringham saw that headless corpse before it was found and at the very least that proves complicity...'

'Complicity!' Trevor spat out the word. 'Complicity with who? Did anyone see her dump those bodies on the motorway? Was she seen threatening either of the victims? We don't even know the name of one of them. Peter, it's you who's cracking. We haven't enough for suspicion let alone complicity.'

'We'll see what Bill says about it.' Peter opened the car door and stepped on to the rubbish strewn road. Seething, Trevor followed suit only to turn back when the radio crackled.

He spoke to control for a few minutes then hung up.

'Problem?' Peter asked.

'Just information,' Trevor muttered.

'Do I have to drag it out of you?'

Trevor had never been so unwilling to pass anything on to his partner before. 'Do you remember the Adam Walker case?'

Peter screwed his mouth thoughtfully. 'Before my time. I was a kid. Didn't a teenage boy go nuts, rape and strangle a girl then throw her body down a disused mineshaft?'

'That's the one.'

'What's that got to do with this?'

'He was – still is – Daisy Sherringham's brother.'

## Chapter Eleven

SAM MAYBERRY, THE SMALL, greying, gnome-like priest who ran the hostel for the homeless was sitting on the front doorstep talking to a filthy, wild-looking creature with long black hair.

‘I expected you two earlier than this.’ Sam said in his soft southern Irish brogue.

‘Sorry, we were held up.’ Trevor sidestepped past Peter who was looking at Sam’s companion.

‘This is Blackie,’ Sam said quietly. ‘Blackie, these two gentlemen are with the police, but they’ve not come to hurt you.’

Blackie stared at them warily from beneath his thatch of matted hair and bushy eyebrows.

‘Is our man still sleeping upstairs?’ Trevor asked.

‘No, he’s eating in the kitchen.’ Sam rose from the step. ‘Come in. I’ll make you tea.’

‘No thanks, I’ve just had one,’ Peter replied.

‘Me too,’ Trevor added. They’d both been in the hostel many times. Despite Sam’s efforts the place was invariably splattered with the most obnoxious filth and, after his experience in the mortuary, the last thing his stomach needed was a dubiously grimy cup filled with greasy tea.

‘Gramps, he’s the one who used to work as a clown,’ Sam explained to Peter, ‘I’d best warn you that he can be a bit strange at times.’

‘Like most of your guests, then.’

Sam, with Blackie following like a faithful dog, led the way through the high-walled, central passage to the

back of the house. 'Gramps lives mostly in the past,' Sam said when they reached the kitchen door. He opened it. 'Gramps?' he addressed an old man who was sitting at a scarred pine table. 'Gramps?' The derelict huddled over his bowl and grunted. 'These two gentlemen would like to talk to you about the pier.'

'Things I could tell you about the pier.' The old man remained hunched over his bowl of cereal but his grey, pinched face lit up at the mention of the pier. For an instant Trevor caught a glimpse of the young man, hidden in the depths of the human wreckage sitting before him.

'Pier used to be crowded in the old days,' the old man recited in a bantering, sing-song voice. It may even have been the same stage accent he'd once used to deliver his scripts. 'People dressed in their Sunday best. Women with gloves and hats on.' He looked up, his mind jerking uncomfortably into the present. 'None of your shabby dress like today,' he continued somewhat ironically, considering the rags he was wearing.

'Do you ever go to the pier now?' Peter asked impatiently.

'Eh. Go to the pier now? No point, young man. No point. Pier's closed.'

'We all know the pier's closed.' Peter's temper began to rise. 'But we've heard people have been seen there. Sleeping on it, even.'

'Sleeping on it? You can't sleep on the pier.' The old man shook his head. 'Couldn't even sleep on the pier in the old days and it was safe then. It's not now. Not safe.' He shook his head from side to side. 'Not safe,' he repeated. 'And there's wire around it, barbed wire. A man could cut himself to ribbons on it. It's not like it was in the old days when people wore their best clothes...'

'To hell with the old days,' Peter muttered.

'Peter, give him time,' Sam admonished.

Furious with Peter, Trevor was about to intervene. Then he noticed Blackie. The man was crouched on his heels swaying backwards and forwards at Sam's feet. He was playing with something. Fondling it. Putting it to his mouth, licking it. When it was covered with spittle he began to polish it in the folds of his ragged coat.

Trevor sensed that Blackie knew he was being watched, but he carried on licking and polishing whatever it was he was holding. When Blackie held it up to the window, Trevor saw what he was treasuring so fondly. Spectacles, a pair of thick lensed, black, plastic spectacles.

Blackie looked at the glasses for a moment then pushed them on his nose. They swung wide on their one arm and fell on the cracked linoleum. Trevor stared down at them. The lenses were thick. They reminded him of leaded glass. He hadn't seen lenses like those since – since

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‘Not then, Gramps. Now.’ Peter continued.

‘Don't go near the pier, not now. Can't. It's wired off. And without my leg –’ Peter turned to Trevor in exasperation. But Trevor's attention was fixed on Blackie, and the glasses.

Trevor moved closer to the old man, crouched down and held out his hand. ‘Blackie,’ Trevor spoke softly. ‘Can I take a look at those please?’

‘They're mine.’ Blackie held them close.

‘Where did you get them?’

‘Bought them. Bought them fair and square.’ He scuttled sideways, scurrying away from Trevor like a crab.

‘I'll pay you twice what you paid for them.’ Trevor fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins. ‘Here you are.’ He opened his hand and showed Blackie the money. ‘Take what you want. Go on. Take it all.’

Blackie saw the glint of gold and silver. He thrust his hand into his clothes, and fingered the spectacles. They

were no good. They wouldn't stay on, not like Father Mayberry's. It was Andy's fault. Andy was always getting change out of him for things that were no good.

Trevor waited patiently while Blackie hesitated. Putting Blackie's reluctance down to wariness he piled the coins on the floor between them.

'Take them Blackie,' he offered. 'They're yours. Just give me the glasses and tell me where you bought them.'

'It's all right, Blackie,' Sam smiled. 'No one's going to harm you. It's all right.'

Gramps was more agile, and quicker-witted than either Peter or Trevor gave him credit for. Forgotten in the new interest evoked by Blackie, he suddenly swooped down from the table, scooped up the money and hopped out through the door.

'Gramps.' Sam ran after him. 'That's stealing. Come back.'

'Leave him, Sam, it doesn't matter.' Ill-humour forgotten in the excitement of a potential new lead, Peter walked over to where Trevor was still crouched on the floor. He dug into his own pocket and laid out a larger selection of coins than the ones Gramps had taken.

'They're yours, Blackie.' Without taking his eyes off Blackie, Trevor pushed the pile of money towards the old man. 'Just give us the glasses, and tell us where you found them. It's very important.'

Muscles tensed at the ready, Peter remained standing equidistant between the two doors. There was no way he'd allow Blackie to do a bunk like Gramps. Blackie stared at Trevor, then without warning he pulled the glasses from his clothes and threw them down next to the money.

'Andy sold them to me.' He grabbed the money greedily. 'He never sells me anything that's good. Never. Cheat. That's what Andy is. Cheat.'

'Did Andy tell you where he got them?' Trevor asked.



‘No. Andy never tells me nothing. Never.’

‘Where’s Andy, Sam?’ Peter asked.

‘As I told Trevor this morning. Andy hasn’t been here for weeks. I’ve been quite worried about him. I spoke to Father Roberts down at the day centre, and he said Andy still goes there occasionally. It’s my guess he’s sleeping rough. I only pray he’s not going to get hurt, wherever he is.’

‘The pier. Andy sleeps on the pier. The clown looks after him. I know.’ Blackie nodded wisely as he pushed the coins Peter had given him deep into his pocket.

‘Have you seen the clown, Blackie?’ Trevor asked.

‘Lots of times. Singing and dancing on stage.’

‘Was it Gramps?’ Peter demanded.

‘Don’t be stupid,’ Blackie spat contemptuously. ‘Gramps can’t dance no more. Not since they chopped his leg off.’

‘Who chopped his leg off?’

‘Hospital. That’s what happens if you go into hospital. They chop your leg off.’

‘Blackie, I explained it to you,’ Sam intervened. ‘Gramps had gangrene. He would have died...’

‘Have you ever slept on the pier?’ Peter interrupted.

‘No. Only been there once. Don’t know no more. Not going to talk no more.’ Blackie clammed his toothless gums firmly shut.

‘How did you get on the pier?’ Peter’s question was met by obstinate silence. ‘Do I have to take you in? Perhaps you’ll feel like talking after you’ve sat for a while in one of our colder cells.’

‘Don’t take me away. Father, don’t let them put me away.’ Blackie flung himself along the floor and locked his hands tightly around Sam Mayberry’s ankles. ‘Please, don’t let them lock me up,’ he cried.

Sam gave Peter a hard look as he stroked Blackie's wild, greasy mane. 'Answer their questions as honestly as you can and no one will take you away. I promise, Blackie.'

'How did you get on the pier?' Peter repeated.

'Andy took me,' Blackie sulked. 'That's all I know. Honest, Mister. We went there in the dark. I didn't see nothing until we were inside. We went in so quick I couldn't show you how. So quick. Really quick. The clown was there. He was funny. There was lights, and singing. It was warm. Andy had a bottle. We drank the bottle and listened to the singing, then we went. That's all, Mister. We didn't break nothing, I didn't do nothing wrong. Honest. Don't put me away. Please, don't put me away.'

Trevor's stomach churned at the rancid smell of rotting cloth and stale sweat that emanated from Blackie's unwashed body.

'If we took you to the pier now, Blackie, could you show us how you got in?' he asked.

'Couldn't.' Blackie's dark eyes glinted cunningly from beneath the tangle of hair. 'It's wired up now. Can't get on the pier. No one can, not since the wire's been put there.'

'Blackie, were you on the pier recently?' Peter crouched low like Trevor.

'Not since the wires.' Blackie's eyes darted nervously around the room. 'Can't say no more. Can I go?' His hand closed over the coins he'd hidden in his clothes. 'I don't know no more. Honest. I'll swear on the Bible. Ask the Father. It's the truth. I want to buy food Father. I'm hungry. Can I go?'

Sam looked to Trevor and Peter.

Recognising that they'd got as much out of him as they were going to for now, Trevor nodded. 'Let him go.'

Blackie needed no second bidding. He scurried out of the door as though he were being chased by dogs.

Trevor laid his handkerchief over the spectacles on the floor and wrapped them in it. 'You'll let us know if Andy comes in, Sam.'

'I will.'

'Thanks, Sam.' Peter headed for the door. He needed fresh air.

'If every copper on the beat looks for Andy we'll pick him up soon,' Trevor prophesised, joining him outside.

'Do you have to arrest Andy?' Sam asked. 'If all he's done is break into the pier...'

'There's a bit more to it than that, Sam. I can't tell you much, but take my word for it, it's important.' Trevor tucked the wrapped spectacles into his shirt pocket.

'It's difficult work you two will be doing,' Sam said tactfully.

'If you hear of anyone, anyone at all using the pier, will you phone the station?' Peter pressed.

'I will. Have drug pushers taken over the place?'

'Drug pushers?' Peter looked at Sam in confusion, then realised what Sam meant. 'We've been taken off the Drug Squad, Sam.'

'I'm sorry to hear it.'

'They haven't sacked us,' Trevor smiled, amused by the expression on Sam's face. He leaned against Peter's car and looked up at the clean blue sky. 'Like everyone else down the station our usual work is taking second place to the motorway murders.'

'Murders. Not here in town surely?'

'Sam, where do you live?' Peter shook his head in amusement. 'The television and newspapers have been full of nothing else for days.'

‘We’ve no television in the hostel. And there’s never enough time to read the papers. The only ones I see are days old and generally wrapped around something.’

‘Two bodies were found at the side of the motorway that runs into town. The heads and hands were removed,’ Trevor explained succinctly. ‘As you can imagine they’re proving difficult to identify. These,’ he tapped the glasses in his pocket, ‘might help with identification.’

‘Two bodies. The poor souls. How dreadful. I’ll say a prayer for them.’

‘You can say a prayer for a missing doctor while you’re at it, Sam. The one recent missing person report we do have, doesn’t fit the description of either body.’

‘A doctor. I don’t know what the world’s coming to.’

‘Has anyone gone missing from the hostel lately, Sam?’ Peter fired a long shot.

‘You know what the hostel is like Peter. People come, people go. Youngsters are the worst. Some stay a few nights, a week or two at most, then move on. We have our regulars like Blackie and Gramps but they make up less than a quarter of the people who sleep here on any one night. And the young girls –’ the priest shook his head in despair. ‘There are so many of them, and more arrive on the doorstep every day. They shouldn’t be here. Not mixed in with the old men, the drunkards, the drug addicts. They should have a hostel of their own. A new and cleaner one.’

‘So, you couldn’t say if anyone’s gone missing?’ Peter pulled a pack of cigars from his pocket and offered the priest one.

‘Andy’s the only regular staying away at the moment. I try to talk to the newcomers, but I couldn’t tell you much about them. Who they are, where they’re going – it’s their business. If I made it mine, I’d never get them in here.’

‘That doesn’t help us,’ Peter unlocked the car door.

‘It’s society,’ Sam pronounced. ‘No one cares for their fellow man. Not any more. None of this,’ he pointed at the building behind him, ‘would have been necessary in the old days. In village communities there were families and friends willing to help people through a crisis. Now the youngsters believe everyone’s against them. They trust no one, and they run. From authority, the police, even their own families and friends. Only the other day I had a couple in here asking after a young man. I couldn’t help them. The boy they were looking for had slept here for a week, and moved on. It was a pity. They were obviously worried about him. Made me wonder why he’d run away in the first place.’

‘Can you remember the name of the lad the couple were looking for, Sam?’ Peter asked, thinking of their unidentified corpse.

‘No. No I’m sorry, I’m hopeless with names,’ he apologised.

‘Try, Sam,’ Peter pressed. ‘It could be important.’

‘I think the others called him Robin, but I couldn’t be sure. Dark-haired, good-looking boy. I remember one of the girls teasing him, telling him he should be a pop star.’

‘The couple who came looking for him. Were they his parents?’ Trevor asked.

‘No. They were too young. The girl was his sister; the man was probably her boyfriend. Nice young fellow. They came about ten at night when the place was crowded. He saw me turn people away and noticed how much I hated having to do it. Before he left he gave me a donation for the hostel. Not many visitors do that.’

‘Can you at least remember his name, Sam?’ Peter pressed.

‘I told you I’m not good with names.’ Sam pushed his glasses further up his nose. ‘He gave me his card though. In case the boy came back.’ He dug into the pocket of his

cassock and pulled out a folded conglomeration of bits of paper. He thumbed through them. 'Here it is,' he separated a stiff card from the rest. 'I wrote the boy's name on the back. Robin – Robin Dart.' He flipped the card over and read the name and address engraved on the other side. 'Dr Tim Sherringham, Grantley Mews.'

Peter let out a long slow whistle.

Trevor reached for his wallet and pulled out a copy of one of the photographs he'd taken from Daisy. 'Is this the man?'

'That's him,' Sam nodded. 'Fine young fellow. He's not in any trouble is he?'

'Not with us.' Trevor replaced the photograph in his wallet. 'But he's been missing for five days.'

'Sam, think,' Peter pleaded. 'Can you remember the name of the girl Tim Sherringham was with and what night they came here?'

'The girl said she was Robin's sister.'

'Was it Amanda?' Trevor asked.

'Could be. I just can't remember.'

'Can you describe her?'

'Small, thin, large glasses, not a bit like Robin. I remember thinking they were nothing alike.' Sam gasped. 'Do you think those could be her glasses? That something's happened to her...'

'That's what we're trying to find out.' Peter sat on the low wall that fronted the hostel. 'You still haven't told us when Tim Sherringham came here.'

'All my days are the same, sometimes I feel as if they've all merged into one long day. They came a week or two ago. I can't be any more precise than that.'

'You said the hostel was full, that you were turning people away. Something else must have happened that day. You must have heard some news, seen someone. Come on, think. This is the first break we've had,' Trevor urged.

‘I’m sorry Trevor. I turn people away from here every night. I remember them coming. I remember him giving me...’ Sam smiled. ‘A cheque. I paid it into the bank, but they’d keep it wouldn’t they? And it would have the date on it.’

‘Can you come to the bank with us now?’ Peter opened his car door.

‘But the hostel...’

‘There must be someone who can take over from you for a couple of hours.’

‘A couple of hours – I can’t spare that much time,’ Sam protested.

‘This is a murder enquiry and you’ve just given us our first lead.’

‘Stop off at St. Mary’s. I’ll ask the curate there to cover for me.’

‘Bless you.’ Peter climbed into the driving seat. For the first time since Tim Sherringham had vanished and the mess had been uncovered on the motorway they had somewhere definite to go. Bill had been proved right. A couple of locals digging in unlikely places had come up with more than the serious crimes squad for all their fancy equipment and bright ideas.

‘Welcome back to the land of the living.’

Daisy opened her eyes. She was in a strange room. The light was muted, and there were metallic noises in the background.

‘Hospital from the inside,’ Judy smiled down at her. ‘You had us all worried for a while.’

‘I can’t remember...’

‘You don’t want to,’ Judy cut her short.

‘I was at Richard’s.’

‘And now you’re in the General. As soon as you feel strong enough we’ll move you into my flat.’

‘What’s the time?’

‘Seven in the evening.’

‘I’ve slept the entire day away, and I wanted to do so much.’

‘It can all wait until tomorrow.’

‘But you took a day off...’

‘Lucky I did.’ Judy moved from the chair at the side of Daisy’s bed and walked to the window. She opened the blinds. Twilight was gathering, and the street lights encircling the bay were flickering with the red glow that precedes amber.

‘Have you been here all day?’ Daisy propped herself up on her elbows. Her mouth was parched and the room wavered around her when she moved.

‘I enjoyed the rest. Sitting next to a sickbed all day with feet propped up and a stack of old magazines is my idea of heaven.’

‘A busman’s holiday?’

‘You should know better than that. When does a houseman get time to sit next to a patient?’ She picked up Daisy’s wrist and took her pulse before looking into her eyes.

‘I’m fine,’ Daisy protested.

A knock at the door was followed by a whispered, ‘It’s me. Are you decent?’

‘What the hell do you think we’re doing in here?’ Judy opened the door to Alan.

‘I had no idea, that’s why I knocked. Glad to see the patient awake and scowling. You must be feeling better.’ He picked up Daisy’s wrist.

‘You can put that back. Judy’s just taken it.’

‘And?’ He looked questioningly at Judy.

‘She’ll live.’

He sat on the bed. ‘Can you remember what happened?’



‘Judy told me I don’t want to.’

‘You had a nightmare.’

‘All I can remember is going to bed in Richard’s house. Then waking up here.’

‘I went to Richard’s this morning, to collect you.’ Judy opened Daisy’s case and shook out her dressing gown. ‘You were still in bed so Hare took me to your room. When I walked in you went crazy and started screaming. Unfortunately you made enough noise to bring up Joanna and Mike.’

‘Joanna and Mike?’ Daisy frowned.

‘Joanna and Mike,’ Judy repeated. ‘The two PC Plods were there too, and true to their flat-footed profession they barged in as well.’

‘How did I get here?’

‘After we sent the police off with a flea in their ear, Mike called Alan. We decided the best place for you was here.’ Judy draped the dressing gown around Daisy’s shoulders.

‘And Richard agreed with you?’

‘He wasn’t consulted.’

‘But he’s found out,’ Alan said. ‘I came here to tell you he’s on his way.’

‘Oh hell,’ Judy muttered.

‘Oh hell nothing,’ Daisy swung her legs over the side of the bed. ‘What can he say? I’m over twenty-one. And I’ve decided to move in with Judy, if she’ll have me.’

‘How many times do I have to offer?’ Judy asked.

‘Are you sure you’re up to moving anywhere?’ Alan steadied Daisy when she slumped forward.

‘I’m sure,’ she gripped the edge of the bed.

‘That was a pretty hefty dose I...’

‘Of what?’ she glared at Alan.

‘You don’t want to know.’

‘Yes I do.’

‘It might be better if Richard found you in my flat when he arrives,’ Judy intervened. ‘If he sees you in here, he might try to get you into his clinic.’

‘Good idea. He can hardly pick me up and carry me out once I’m settled in your place,’ Daisy agreed.

‘We’ll have to move quickly. As I said, he’s already on his way,’ Alan said.

‘Go downstairs, meet him and redirect him to my flat. Very slowly,’ Judy added.

‘You have womanly charms and wiles, you do it. I’ll carry Daisy’s case and wait for her to dress.’ Alan sank into the only chair in the room.

Judy didn’t argue with him. ‘See you upstairs in a few minutes, Daisy.’

Daisy reached for the suitcase Judy had left on the bed. She pulled out the black suit and underclothes she had laid out the previous night in Richard’s house.

‘Careful,’ Alan grabbed her elbows when she swayed. ‘How about I walk you to the bathroom, one step at a time. You can dress in there but don’t lock the door. I promise not to come in unless I hear a crash.’

## Chapter Twelve

‘THE KEY TO TIM Sherringham’s disappearance is in the phone call, Bill. It has to be.’ Peter picked up his coffee cup and looked down at the dregs.

‘What do you think, Trevor?’ Bill Mulcahy turned to Trevor who’d been sitting quietly, too damned quietly for his liking, by the door ever since he’d come back from telephoning the hospital to check on Daisy Sherringham’s condition.

‘I agree with Peter. The key to Sherringham’s disappearance has to lie in that call.’

‘Daisy Sherringham says she answered it, but she only spoke briefly to whoever was at the other end. It was Tim Sherringham who told her he’d been called out on the Hawkins case. And that means one of two things. Either whoever was at the other end of that line knew Tim Sherringham’s work load and patients. Or Tim Sherringham wanted to disappear and used the Hawkins case as an alibi.’ Peter abandoned his cup on Mulcahy’s desk.

‘Funny time to choose to disappear, four in the morning. And we still don’t know who made that phone call. I checked the records. It was made on a mobile. We have the number but as yet no record of it ever being issued,’ Mulcahy revealed.

‘Foreign?’ Trevor suggested.

‘Possibly – they’re looking into it.’

‘I pity the poor bastard doing the leg work on that one.’

‘Suppose Tim Sherringham had a lady friend,’ Peter said thoughtfully. ‘Not Amanda Dart, that’s pushing it even for me, but someone else. Another nurse perhaps. What better time to run off with her than four in the morning. The man worked all day in the hospital in full view of staff and patients. He travelled to and from the General with his wife. Everyone agrees Daisy Sherringham practically lived in his pocket.’

‘So when did he fit the girlfriend in?’ Trevor queried.

‘He found time to spend a couple of hours in the hostel for the homeless with Amanda Dart,’ Peter pointed out. ‘Doctors work shifts, we know Tim and Daisy occasionally worked different hours. It’s conceivable he could have taken time off from Daisy before. Booked into a hotel with his bit on the side...’

‘I don’t buy it. Daisy...’

‘Grow up, Joseph. There’s no such thing as the perfect marriage, or the perfect woman. Besides,’ Peter raised a mocking eyebrow, ‘this theory accommodates your lust for the lady quite nicely. Who better to console the slighted wife than the bachelor policeman? Provided of course, the lady hasn’t developed the same murdering tendencies as her brother.’

Bill saw Trevor’s colour heighten. ‘Let’s drop the suppositions and consider the facts,’ he ordered. ‘Thanks to routine police work we have our first firm identification. And thanks to you two, we have her glasses, if not her head.’ Bill looked to Peter. ‘Andy?’

‘We have every copper on the beat, Sam and the Salvation Army looking for him. He’ll turn up in his own good time.’

‘I just hope his good time proves to be ours.’ Bill said sourly.

‘Any news on the second victim?’ Trevor asked.

‘We’ve had the PM report. Not much in it we didn’t already know.’ Bill picked it up and scanned it. ‘Appendix scar, not recent. Old fracture of the lower left arm. Undigested salted peanuts in his stomach.’

‘On his way back from the pub?’

‘Club more like it given his evening dress, or private party. But we’re into guesswork, not facts now, Collins. Unlike Amanda Dart. The blood tests, height, weight, skin colour, vaccinations and the clincher – DNA lifted from her room, all check out. One of her brothers is flying in from Gibraltar tonight. He’s in the Navy. I’ve arranged for him to be interviewed after he’s formally identified what’s left of Amanda. He might be able to shed some light on the Robin Dart disappearance.’

‘Could the headless corpse be him?’ Trevor asked.

‘We’re checking the DNA against Amanda’s. But can you see a man who slept in a shelter in an evening suit?’ Bill asked.

‘He could have got a job in a pub or a club ...’

‘As I said, we’re checking,’ Bill said impatiently. ‘What I can tell you is the Darts weren’t a close family. More a textbook case for the social services. Drunken father serving time for beating his wife to death. Kids in and out of care from the day they were born.’

‘Amanda and Robin must have been close for Amanda to go looking for him in the hostel,’ Trevor chipped in.

‘With Tim Sherringham, exactly one week to the day before Sherringham disappeared.’ Bill threw the pencil he was holding on to his desk. ‘Time for theories.’

‘Sam Mayberry and Luke Roberts down at the day centre said that Robin Dart could have been no more than a youngster down on his luck. But they both recall signs of nervous illness or – drug abuse.’

‘Any hard evidence? Sign of needles? Association with known pushers?’ Bill asked.

‘None they could recall,’ Trevor admitted.

‘Did they come up with the names of friends, places he hung out?’

Peter shook his head. ‘They had no idea why he disappeared, or why Amanda and Sherringham went looking for him at the hostel.’

Bill shuffled the mess of papers on his desk and extracted one. ‘Helpful lady in Social Services went through the records for me. When Robin Dart left care at sixteen he was found a live-in job as a skivvy in a London hotel. A year later he auditioned for Drama School, and was accepted. Then, for some reason that’s not recorded, he left. I rang the Principal who put Robin’s disappearance down to lack of money. The next time he was heard of, was when he rang Social Services here. They’d found him the job in London but as he was officially an adult, they couldn’t, or wouldn’t, help. The entry that recorded the phone call closed his file. I can only surmise he packed his bags and came back here because his sister was here.’

‘It’s a short trip from the railway station to Jubilee Street, when you’re low on friends and money.’ Trevor murmured.

‘An everyday story of our country’s folk,’ Peter agreed. ‘And we still haven’t anything concrete that sheds any light on Sherringham’s disappearance.’

‘Nearly a week of investigating hasn’t turned up one breath of scandal that implicates the man,’ Trevor said thoughtfully.

‘Eric Hedley...’

‘You marked Hedley down as a misfit, remember,’ Trevor reminded Collins. ‘And all Hedley had was malicious gossip. Wasn’t he the source of your Tim Sherringham – Amanda Dart affair?’

‘Point taken,’ Peter conceded grudgingly.

‘It could be that Tim Sherringham only felt sorry for Amanda Dart. Pity, pure and simple. You saw the girl.’

‘She was pathetic by any standard,’ Peter rubbed his hands through his hair – a sure sign that he was tired. ‘But I’m not saying that Amanda Dart was Tim Sherringham’s bit on the side. There has to be someone else.’

‘Who?’

‘Now there you have me, but we do know Daisy tried to live in his pocket,’ Peter was reluctant to let his theory go. ‘Supposing Sherringham was worried about her finding out about his affair. Wives ask questions, particularly when it comes to money. I know – and affairs cost money. Hotel rooms – wining and dining –’

‘The cheque he gave Sam was drawn on a personal account. No other signatory,’ Bill said baldly.

‘The man who gave Sam five hundred pounds was worried about paying for a hotel room,’ Trevor mocked. ‘No one knows for certain when Robin Dart went missing, Sam and Luke can’t remember, but they both agree he hasn’t been seen in months rather than weeks. The one person who could have helped us there is Amanda Dart and she’s one of our victims. Supposing she was upset by her brother’s disappearance and the upset began to affect her work. Sherringham worked on the same ward as Amanda. Perhaps he found her crying, say after a run in with your friend the Hitler-sister, Peter. We know from Judy Osbourne that Sherringham had a social conscience, and the cheque he gave Sam proves he was a soft touch. Perhaps he offered Amanda the use of his shoulder, and listened to the story of the missing brother. The Tim Sherringham I’ve heard about would try to help.’

‘There you go again, Joseph, expounding your belief in the milk of human kindness. How many times do I have

to tell you that no one does something for nothing in this life?’

‘Sherringham was a doctor, not a policeman,’ Trevor said flatly. ‘Perhaps he had some humanity left.’

Bill turned to Trevor. ‘I’ll buy your story as far as Amanda Dart and Sherringham go, but where does it fit in with the motorway bodies, apart from Amanda being one of the victims?’

‘Perhaps Robin Dart and Sherringham have been murdered too.’

‘We’ve enough bodies without looking for more,’ Peter complained.

‘Upstairs sent the helicopter out again today to look for a second body dump.’ Bill looked at Peter. ‘Have you checked out the clown sightings?’

‘They check out.’

‘That’s not what I asked.’

‘We delegated,’ Peter admitted. ‘And while we’re on the topic of clowns, Joanna Holbourne had a Pierrette for a grandmother. Richard Sherringham’s father-in-law still owns the pier. Trevor and I looked at it. It’s fenced off and apparently impregnable, but we have a couple of unverified clown sightings on it, or rather in it, by down and outs.’

‘Want a search warrant?’

‘May as well. By the way, Joseph,’ Peter smiled disarmingly, ‘you haven’t told us when Daisy Sherringham’s coming in for questioning.’

‘She’s had a nervous collapse.’

‘Sir,’ Constable Harries knocked and opened the door. ‘We’ve had a response to the photographs of Amanda Dart that were put out by the media. And someone’s rung in with a sighting of Sherringham’s Fiat. A Mr...’ Harries read the slip of paper he was holding, ‘... Douglas says he



walks his dog every day on the cliffs above Hunter's Cove...'

'That border the Sherringham estate?' Peter interrupted.

'And?' Bill Mulcahy looked to Harries.

'He says he saw Sherringham's Fiat parked off the road, on the grassed area of the cliff. Apparently it was parked in the same spot for two days. On the second day he checked round it, looked through the windows and took the number. He said he was thinking of reporting it to us. But it wasn't there this morning.'

'Exactly when and for how long was the car parked there?' Mulcahy barked.

'Mr Douglas saw it the morning after Dr Sherringham disappeared. It was on the cliff top for two days after that, then it went.'

'And he comes forward when it's too damned late for us to see for ourselves. Great. Bloody great. Have it checked out Harries' Mulcahy ordered.

'Call was made direct to the incident room. Men have already been sent to the cliff, and to interview Mr Douglas.'

'Amanda Dart?'

'Two people have come in. They both saw Dr Sherringham and Amanda Dart boarding a yacht in the Marina on the night after Dr Sherringham disappeared and the evening of the day Amanda Dart last worked at the hospital.'

Mulcahy narrowed his eyes. 'Are they nuts?'

'Not obviously so, sir. And they're not connected. One's a retired colonel.'

'Where are they now?'

'Outside, sir. I thought you might like to interview them before the London Squad.'

'Show them in, Harries, one at a time.'

Robin Dart crouched down, spine straight, arms outstretched in front of a battered cabin trunk.

‘One – two – three – lift,’ he murmured, steeling himself for the back-breaking load. He lifted, groaned, and staggered out to the rust-spotted van parked in front of the open door of the Community Centre.

‘That the last of the costumes?’ A fair-haired girl called after he’d dumped the trunk on to the floor of the transit.

‘I sincerely hope so.’

‘I’ll check round,’ she offered. ‘You want to drive?’

‘OK.’ He gave the trunk a valedictory shove, before slamming the van doors.

‘I told Alex and Damian we’d give them a lift home from the pub.’ Jock, the Scottish member of the Community Theatre Group, climbed into the van.

‘Fine,’ Robin repeated absentmindedly as he climbed into the driver’s seat.

The fair-haired girl reappeared. ‘Nothing forgotten,’ she said brightly, moving along the bench seat next to Jock.

Robin switched on the ignition.

Jock leaned forward and fiddled with the radio. ‘Arts Review will be starting on the local station in a couple of minutes. We should get a crit.’

‘It had better be good,’ the girl shouted above the noise of the engine. ‘I’ve worked my arse off for this production.’

‘Haven’t we all?’ Robin was the newest member of the theatre group, but he’d been with them long enough for the glitter of his equity card to wear off. He was also tired of getting the worst parts, the biggest loads to carry, and

most of the stick when things went wrong. Now if Jock should leave...

Jock glanced at his watch as pips sounded and the newscaster began to speak. 'Local news, good. We haven't missed any of the reviews.'

'Quiet,' Robin hissed.

'... Robin Dart, five feet ten inches tall, brown eyes, black hair. Last seen in Jubilee Street. Police and family are concerned for his safety. If anyone has seen Robin Dart during the past two months, or knows his present whereabouts, would they contact their local police station or telephone this number...'

'What you been doing?' Jock asked Robin.

Robin didn't reply. He swung the van round a corner. 'I'll drop you at the Builders and catch up with you later.'

'You're going to the fuzz?' Jock pulled a face.

'I won't tell if you won't,' the girl said as Robin screeched to a halt in the pub car park.

An elderly widow and a crusty old bachelor had been taking their separate evening walks along the Marina when they'd seen a man and a woman board a boat. From the shore, a distance of a quarter of a mile from the moorings, they'd watched them enter the cabin. And both were prepared to swear that the people they'd seen had been Tim Sherringham and Amanda Dart.

'Not many men stand that tall,' the colonel barked to Bill Mulcahy. 'It was the man in that photograph. And I saw him plain as I see you now.'

'And not many women wear glasses that thick,' the twig-thin widow had chirped. 'I saw her photograph on the front page of the *Herald* tonight, and I said to myself, that's her. That's the one.'

'Did you see the name of the boat they boarded?' Mulcahy asked.

‘Couldn’t see that far,’ the colonel bellowed, ‘when you get to my age the eyes go.’

‘And yet you’re sure you saw Tim Sherringham and Amanda Dart?’ Trevor and Bill had interviewed the witnesses separately but decided to bring them together in the hope that they might spark one another to remember more.

Mulcahy handed each witness a sheet of paper and a pencil. ‘Write down everything you can think of that might help us to identify the boat.’

Alan Cummins pushed his way reluctantly into the crowded pub. He trod on the foot of a cook, managed to avoid a group of porters downing their third pint, and reached the bar.

‘Full tonight.’ Mike Edmunds pocketed his change.

‘Place is always the same after the day shift,’ Alan grumbled. ‘Anyone would think hospital staff have no homes to go to.’

‘What will it be Dr Cummins?’ the barmaid who’d served Mike waited for Alan’s order, ignoring the bangs and shouts coming from the other end of the bar.

‘Pint and a curry Mavis.’

‘Wife at the mother-in-law’s again?’ she winked at Mike. ‘We only ever see him in here when he’s a grass widower.’

‘She’ll be back tomorrow.’ Alan took his pint and felt in his pocket for change.

‘Beef or chicken curry?’ she asked.

‘Is there a difference?’

‘Not so you’d notice.’

‘Make it beef.’

She took his money. ‘Where will you be sitting?’

‘There’s a stool free at my table,’ Mike offered.

'I'll bring it to you when it's ready,' Mavis smiled at Alan.

'You never do that for me, Mavis,' Mike complained.

'You didn't set my son's hernia to rights.'

Alan watched Mike cross the room as he waited for his change. The place was literally bursting at the seams; some of the drinkers had spilled out into the car park and were half-sitting, half-leaning against the cars. Then he saw the stool Mike had offered him, sandwiched between Mike, and Eric Hedley.

'Oh well, beggars can't be choosers,' he muttered.

'You say something, Doctor?' Mavis handed him a pile of coins.

'Talking to myself, Mavis.' He pocketed his change. He'd only come to the pub because he couldn't stand his own cooking. It was always the same when Carol and the kids went away for a night or two. Not that she did it that often.

He would have preferred to have spent the evening at Judy's, but, feeling like a coward, he'd left when she'd arrived with Richard Sherringham in tow. He'd liked Tim Sherringham but on the few occasions he'd met his brother he'd considered him arrogant and self-important.

He wondered, not for the first time, if that were really the case, or if it was sheer prejudice on his part. Perhaps he was suffering from an inferiority complex because, given Richard Sherringham's success, his professional talents had to be superior to his own. Or perhaps Daisy's dislike of private medicine had rubbed off on him.

He fought his way to Mike's table, slopping the froth from his pint down the neck of a buxom auxiliary nurse who worked in Casualty. He expected a mouthful from her, but she merely smiled weakly at him.

'I don't know why I come here after a hard day'

‘To see people standing up instead of lying down?’ he suggested.

Mike pulled the stool out from under the table for him.

‘It’s unusual to see you here at this time of day. Carol thrown you out?’

‘It’s half-term, she’s at her mother’s.’

‘And when the cat’s away the mice will play,’ Eric Hedley smirked.

‘In here?’ Alan raised his eyebrows. ‘You’re joking.’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Take that blonde nurse from the surgical ward. I wouldn’t mind her ministering to my needs on a dark night.’

‘You wouldn’t, she might,’ Mike retorted.

‘We can’t all have our lady loves on tap,’ Eric fished.

Alan put his pint on the table. ‘How’s Amy, Mike?’

‘Planning our wedding. There’ll be an invitation in the post for you and Carol.’

‘Good for you,’ Alan clapped him on the back. ‘The world needs more married men.’

‘That’s why I was in the Sherringham house this morning.’

‘I wasn’t asking,’ Alan pointed out.

‘Richard Sherringham’s offered me a three week stint working as his anaesthetist in the clinic. I’ll be standing in for Tony until he gets back. I’ve four weeks leave coming to me. If I work through, it’ll give me just about enough cash to put a deposit on a house.’

‘You don’t intend to stay in private practice?’

‘Tony’ll be back next month. There’s no way a surgeon needs two anaesthetists. But I might carry on with the odd bit of freelance work for Joanna Sherringham. Medical tests and examinations on volunteers who’ve been testing the cosmetics manufactured by the company she works for.’

‘And very lucrative it is too, old boy.’

Alan and Mike both looked at Eric Hedley.

‘Why the surprise? Married men aren’t the only ones who need cash. I’ve been working for her for months,’ Eric gloated. ‘It was my suggestion she sub-contract more of her work out. I can’t cope with it all.’ He finished his whisky and soda and handed Mike the glass. ‘So you’ve me to thank for your good fortune. I’m drinking old malt.’

Unlike Jock, Robin Fellows didn’t hate the police. He was wary of them, went out of his way to avoid them, which hadn’t been easy when he’d lived in Jubilee Street, but that evening he was prepared to trade his distrust for extreme loathing. He would have enjoyed throttling the Duty Officer at the town’s main station and watched quite impassively as his face turned purple.

‘Now if you’ll fill in this form...’

‘I came to help, not fill in forms.’ Robin protested, and not for the first time.

‘I appreciate that – sir –’ the pause before and after the – sir – just to let him know he didn’t warrant the title. ‘If you put down your name and address...’

‘I’m not filling in any form. I came because I heard Robin Dart...’

‘Robin Dart?’ Trevor stopped suddenly, sloshing the coffees he was carrying over the tray. He stared at the young man. ‘You’re Robin Dart?’

‘I am.’ Robin eyed the tall, thin, scruffy man suspiciously. He would look more at home in the back of the theatre van than the police station. If this character was a modern copper, he decided that he’d better take a closer look around the pubs he patronised in future.

‘How would you like a coffee and a chat in a quiet room down the corridor?’ Trevor offered.

Robin stepped back to allow a constable to drag a drunk down the corridor that led to the cells. 'Do I have to sign anything first?'

'No.'

Robin forgot the Duty Officer and remembered the "family" who were worried about him. "Family" could only mean Amanda, and he'd got no sense out of the nurses' hostel when he tried phoning her after the broadcast.

'All right, you have your chat,' he followed Trevor out of the reception area.

Mulcahy flicked through the reports in his office. 'Here you are – take your pick – bloody pathologists. The Home Office variety are no better than the locals.'

'Coffee, sir?' Harries carried a tray into Mulcahy's office.

Mulcahy looked up quizzically. 'I thought Sergeant Joseph was doing that.'

'He's interviewing someone who's volunteered information on Robin Dart.'

'I hope that someone is a more likely candidate than the two geriatrics who volunteered information on Amanda Dart and Tim Sherringham,' Peter took a plastic cup from the tray.

Mulcahy spooned sugar into his coffee. Peter lifted his eyes to the hapless Harries. 'How would you like to do a bit of research?'

'Can I, sir?' Harries asked Mulcahy.

'If you want to volunteer for legwork, boy, that's your look out.'

'I want to know Daisy Sherringham's movements over the past couple of weeks. What shifts she worked. What she did and who she saw in her spare time.'

'That sounds easy enough, Sergeant.' Harries smiled.



‘Not when you have to do it discreetly, it isn’t.’ Harries’ clean-cut, clean-shaven face and eager expression reminded Peter of a faithful and trusting puppy. ‘Think you can handle it?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You got it.’

‘I’ll start work on it right away.’ Harries picked up the empty tray and left the room.

‘I can’t remember you being that obliging when you were in his shoes,’ Mulcahy commented.

‘I can’t recall you being as sweet to me as you are to him.’

‘We all mellow as we get older, Collins. One day it’ll even happen to you.’

‘That’ll be the day.’

Mulcahy handed him a sheaf of papers. ‘Potential witnesses who’ve phoned in. Back to work. This is a murder enquiry, not a bloody picnic.’

## Chapter Thirteen

IT TOOK SOME TIME for Trevor to locate a free interview room, giving him ample time to size up Robin Dart. The man was less than six foot but he gave the impression of more height. Thickset, well built, he had the slant-eyed, round-faced, high-cheekboned features of the eastern European. His thick, blue-black hair hung straight to his collar and his muscular arms swung easily by his side. He reminded Trevor of a better looking young version of Charles Bronson, but for all the outward show of hard physique there was something soft about him. The mark of the artist, the dreamer? – Trevor wondered when he finally ushered him into an empty room.

‘So this is comfort, police style.’ Robin pulled one of the hard chairs out from under the table and sat on it. Trevor had been in the interview room and the others like it, many times, but the remark prompted him to look around. Blank beige walls, parquet flooring, utility metal legged table, uncomfortable polypropylene chairs, – hardly inspiring, or even pleasant. But despite the disparaging comment, his witness was more relaxed here than he had been in the corridor.

Trevor pushed one of the coffees he’d carried into the room across the table towards the boy.

‘Thank you, Constable.’

‘I’m Trevor Joseph,’ Trevor consciously dropped the sergeant. ‘Thank you for coming in.’

‘The radio announcement said “Family” was worried. Family can only mean one person.’

‘Do you mind telling me who that is?’

‘I don’t like games, Trevor Joseph.’

‘Your sister was worried about you. She went looking for you in Jubilee Street.’

‘I thought she was well rid of me.’

Trevor reached for his coffee. Self-pity was something he wanted to discourage. Particularly when he remembered what he had to tell this man before they left the room.

‘Why did you leave drama school?’

‘I came here to tell Amanda I’m all right. I wouldn’t have bothered if I’d been able to talk to her, but they wouldn’t even take a message in the nurses’ hostel. Is she all right?’

‘Please just answer a couple of questions. They may help us – and Amanda,’ Trevor added.

‘Amanda’s not in any trouble, is she?’

Was it his imagination, or had Robin Dart’s colour drained? It was difficult to tell under the neon light. His hands were shaking. He saw him looking at them and hid them under the table.

‘Supposing you answer my questions first. Then I’ll tell you about Amanda.’

Robin sank his face into his hands. ‘It’s all my fault.’ His voice was muffled by his fingers. ‘She didn’t want to do any of it. I forced her.’

‘To do what?’ Trevor didn’t understand what Robin was trying to tell him. But he was experienced enough not to press a reluctant witness.

‘I couldn’t give a damn about me. Only Amanda. She’s worth ten of me. And you’re a bloody fool if you can’t see that it’s my fault she did what she did.’ Robin moved one of his hands and took a cigarette from a crushed pack in his shirt pocket. He pulled a box of matches from his frayed denim jacket and lit it. ‘A couple of years ago I got a place in Drama College, in London.

Thought I'd made it. Watch out, Jude Law, here I come.'

He gave a short rancid laugh. 'I didn't learn much in college except how to drink, swear and talk a lot of bullshit. In the end I got fed up of being short of money so I started busking. Playing the guitar in the underground. To say the least I was I. I didn't realise there were pitches and pitches. I'd moved in on someone else's and they beat me up. College found out about it, they weren't too pleased either. That coming on top of a load of other things you already know about was enough to get me the boot. I had no money, nowhere to go; I'd only just come out of hospital. I tried ringing Social Services here – they'd sent me to London in the first place, but they wouldn't help, so I thought of Amanda, and hitched my way here anyway. It wasn't fair of me, I know. She lives in the nurses' hostel. She couldn't have put me up even if she'd wanted to. She offered me money, but when I arrived it was late, and she didn't have enough on her for me to rent a room or anything. And I wouldn't let her draw any out of her account – not until I had a job and the prospect of paying her back. So I ended up in Jubilee Street.

Trevor drank his coffee. It was a story. Truthful? Or carefully phrased to hide the shaded incidents lurking in Robin's past? And what was it that he was supposed to already know about?

'There was this guy in Jubilee Street... You ever been in Jubilee Street?'

Trevor nodded.

'Then you know what the place is like. This guy Lee wasn't like the others. He wasn't a loser. Just a bloke down on his luck. He couldn't stand the filth and the old drunkards either. And he was getting out. Told me about it. Asked if I wanted to go along with him. Of course I said yes.'

‘Did you have any joy?’ Trevor had seen just how short the slide between Jubilee Street and the respectable end of town could be when someone was on the way down. He’d also noticed how steep it was when that someone tried to drag themselves back up.

‘He had joy all right. I didn’t. That was the bloody problem. He’d seen a note on the board at the day centre. “Young people wanted without family ties to work abroad.” He’d taken the notice down so there’d be less competition for the job, whatever it was. When he read it again he decided there might be room for more than one. So he asked if I’d like to go along for an interview.’

‘You went?’

‘Yes. It was hotel work in Saudi Arabia. He had experience and was offered a job. Good money, good prospects, free food, accommodation – the works. He grabbed at the chance.’

‘And you?’

‘I was offered a job but there was a medical. He passed, I didn’t.’

Trevor let his curiosity ride. It wasn’t the time to ask what Robin took. The shaking hands, the nervousness – heroin – cocaine – crack – he had the grey, pinched look of long-term sickness about him. But then again, there was nothing in his symptoms that couldn’t be put down to Jubilee Street – that’s if he still lived there.

‘So this mate of yours took the job and left you behind?’

‘I would have done the same. I went to see Amanda the next day. She insisted on giving me money. Enough to pay a deposit on a rented flat, but I spent it. When she found out what I’d spent it on, she wouldn’t give me any more. I begged her to help me. She gave me the address of a place. I went there once, but I didn’t go again – and then

—’ Robin squashed the butt end of his cigarette in the tin ashtray on the table.

‘And then?’

‘I told you I don’t like games. That’s why I’m here isn’t it. To tell you about the stuff Amanda took from the hospital and gave to me. It wasn’t the money. She would have given me every penny she had if I’d wanted it for anything else. But she was afraid for me. Afraid I’d use infected needles. Afraid of what the pushers use to cut the drugs. So she raided the drugs cabinet on the ward she worked on, got me clean needles and...’

‘Pethadine,’ Trevor murmured, remembering the ward Amanda worked on.

‘And some pills. Omnapon I think they were called.’

‘I know the ones.’

‘They were useless.’

‘You’re lucky to be alive.’

Robin pulled out another cigarette, and sat there, staring at it, not attempting to light it.

‘She hated doing it. But I made her. In the end we had a terrible argument. She told me she wouldn’t get me any more morphine or needles. That I was a hopeless case. That I didn’t even want to help myself. I went nuts. I threatened to telephone the hospital. Shop her for stealing drugs. I warned her she’d lose her job – that she’d never make a nurse. I knew how much she wanted to be a nurse.’ He pushed his hair away from his face. His forehead was damp with sweat. ‘I begged her to help me. Just one last time. She wouldn’t.’

Trevor finished his coffee and pushed his cup to the edge of the table. ‘Did you shop her?’ he asked.

‘No.’ Robin finally lit his cigarette. ‘I went back to Jubilee Street that night because I had nowhere else to go. I was ill, shaking. I’d hit bottom and knew it. No money for a fix. Amanda had turned her back on me. Then a guy

came on to me. He'd noticed me shaking. He gave me a couple of pills. They helped a bit. He also gave me the address of a place I could go to. He'd been there. It hadn't worked for him, but he told me that it had worked for some of the guys there. But he warned me that no one could really help. That if I was going to get my life back I'd have to do it myself.'

'It worked?'

'I've been clean now for six – no seven months. It's not been easy, but I'm working with a community theatre group. The wages are crap but it's a start.' He picked up the box of matches on the table.

'I've been meaning to go and see Amanda. Tell her I'm fine, but I was afraid to face her. That last row we had – the things I said to her – I didn't know if she'd forgiven me. But that doesn't mean I don't care for her.' He looked at Trevor fiercely. 'She's all I've got. I've never bothered much with the others.'

'Your other brothers and sisters?'

'Brothers. Amanda's my only sister. You won't be too hard on her will you? It was all my fault. I made her do it. And she's worked so hard. The last thing I want is for her to lose her job.'

'Was Amanda ever with anyone when you saw her?'

'No.'

'Think hard. Did you ever meet any of her friends? Anyone who worked with her at the hospital?'

'No. What is this?' Robin ground his second cigarette to powder in the ashtray on the table, then reached into his crushed pack for a third. He saw Trevor watching him and kicked his chair back.

Trevor noticed the way Robin's hands shook when they carried a fresh cigarette to his mouth. He didn't know whether Robin had any problems besides the ones he'd told him about, but what he did know was that Robin Dart

was a man close to breaking point. And that was enough to make him want to tread easy, not push any harder than he had to. Experience had taught him that gentle methods reaped more benefits with the Robins of this world than the heavy tactics Peter habitually employed. He played with his empty coffee cup for a moment and considered his next move.

‘Your friend? Did Amanda ever meet him?’

‘My friend?’ Robin looked at him blankly.

‘The one who got the job in Saudi Arabia.’

‘Amanda never met him, and I never saw him again.’

‘And he went, to Saudi Arabia, there and then?’

‘They gave him money. A room for the night. He was going to go up to London the next day to begin his training.’

‘Where did they put him up?’

‘The hotel where they interviewed us.’

‘Which is?’

‘The Grand, on the front. Know the one I mean?’

Trevor knew it. It had seen better days, but it was a palace compared to Jubilee Street. ‘What was the name of the people who interviewed you?’

‘The man was called Jones; I’ve no idea of the name of the firm.’

‘The medicals. Where were they held?’

‘In the hotel. After the interview.’

‘Did you get the name of the doctor who examined you?’

‘Neither he, nor the nurse volunteered the information and I didn’t ask.’

‘What did he look like?’

‘Middle height, short brown hair, not exactly fat, but chubby, brown glasses. I remember thinking he was – not exactly gay, but...’

‘Effeminate?’ Trevor suggested.



‘Neuter more like it.’

‘Colour of eyes?’

‘I can’t remember.’

‘How about the nurse?’

‘She was a looker. Good figure. Black glasses, but you could imagine her taking them, and a lot of other things off, if you know what I mean.’

‘Hair, eyes?’

‘Brown, I think her eyes were blue but I’m not sure.’

‘The examination, what did it consist of?’

Robin squirmed in his seat. Trevor looked him squarely in the eye.

‘Robin I’m not going to bust you. If I’d wanted to, I would have done it by now. You’ve helped me to answer some questions, and I’m grateful. If you ever need me to help you, I’ll return the favour. And that’s a promise.’

‘The examination was pretty general. Blood tests, urine, chest X-ray, heart, lungs, vaccination test.’ Robin pulled up his sleeve and showed Trevor a small scar on the inside of his arm.

‘Do you think you failed because you were an addict?’

Robin took a deep breath, and raised his eyes to Trevor’s. ‘The nurse checked the veins at the back of my knees.’

‘Mainlining heroin?’

‘I told you I’m clean now.’

Trevor noted the crushed pack of cigarettes that Robin had left on the table, his nicotine-stained fingers, the jerky hand movements that escalated every time he spoke. He was off it all right.

‘I believe you are.’

‘That helps,’ Robin fingered the empty cigarette pack.

Trevor said nothing. He'd seen junkies who'd climbed out of the pit before. He'd also seen some of them afterwards. When they'd slid back into the gutter.

'What happened then?'

'The doctor asked, I couldn't deny it. Then I left.'

'Your friend?'

'I went. He stayed. We said goodbye. I'd only met him the night before.'

'And you never saw him again.'

'No.'

'You said his name was Lee. Lee what?'

'He never said.'

'Do you know where he was from?'

'No.'

Trevor noticed the cigarette packet was empty. 'Would you like me to get you another pack of cigarettes?'

'That would be good.'

Trevor opened the door and called to the duty officer, then returned to his chair.

'Tell me more about Amanda. Did she ever talk about the hospital?'

'Yes, she told me about her patients, the babies she'd helped deliver.'

'Did she mention any of the doctors?'

'One who worked on her ward. I think there was more than a touch of hero worship there. Apparently he'd got her out of a jam with the ward sister. I wondered if I'd caused the jam, but Amanda never said what it was. However she did say the sister was a right bitch.'

'Can you remember the name of the doctor?'

'Amanda never said.'

'Was Amanda going out with him?'

'I asked but Amanda said he was happily married.'

Trevor fiddled with his pen for a moment then threw it on the table. Robin Dart was telling the truth. He had no

reason not to. The man had walked through the door of his own accord. He was scared, but his fear was for his sister, and what she'd done because of him. Not for himself. And what he'd said about the doctor on her ward made sense of the Amanda Dart – Tim Sherringham connection. If Tim Sherringham had caught her stealing needles and morphine capsules, he may well have prised the truth out of her. And that would give him reason enough to visit Jubilee Street in her company, to look for the brother that had made her risk what little she had – her training, and her career.

But where did Robin's story tie in with the murder of Amanda Dart and the disappearance of Tim Sherringham?

'Can I see Amanda? Is she all right?' Robin's voice was shrill with concern.

'Robin...'

'If it's all right with you, I'd like to see her and go. I'll come back later if you need me. But I promised some people I'd meet them in a pub. I'm their transport,' he explained.

'Did you know that Amanda went down to the hostel in Jubilee Street to look for you?' Trevor watched for a reaction.

'You told me.' Robin stopped half-way to the door. 'Did anything happen to her down there?'

'We don't know. Robin.' Trevor steeled himself. Experience had taught him that quick and blunt was best. 'There's no easy way to tell you this. Amanda's been murdered.'

Robin stared at Trevor in total bewilderment. If he was acting, Trevor decided it was an Academy performance.

'We have no clear idea of how, or why. Her body was found at the side of the motorway.'

‘One of those headless bodies everyone’s talking about?’ Robin sank slowly back down on to his chair.

‘Yes. That’s why we put that call out on the media for you. We’ve contacted your brother in Gibraltar. But we wanted to talk to you.’

Head bowed, Robin leaned heavily on the table top. ‘I should have stayed away from her. I should never have come here...’

‘What makes you think that you seeing her had anything to do with her death?’

Robin clenched his fists, pushed himself away from the table and walked towards the door. ‘I have to go.’

‘I can book you a room next to the one we’ve taken for your brother.’ Trevor was reluctant to let Robin go. There was always more. Every witness left something out, it was a policeman’s job to find out what. The sergeant who’d trained him had drilled that into every recruit. What the sergeant hadn’t told him, or any of the other rookies, was how, short of using brute force, to detain a witness who wanted to run out through the door.

‘No.’

‘If I let you go now, will you come back? Tonight?’ he pressed.

‘Tomorrow. I need to think. And I don’t want to see Steve.’

‘Steve?’

‘My brother, all he used to do was beat me up when I was a kid.’

‘You’ve had a shock. You should sit down. I’ll get you more coffee.’

‘No thanks.’

‘I need an address, a phone number where I can contact you.’ He handed Robin his notebook. The boy scribbled both down on a clean page, then he left.

Trevor watched Robin walk down the corridor. He'd look him up tomorrow if he didn't come in. There might be something more. That one omission the sergeant used to talk about.

Thick swirls of grey shadowy darkness enveloped the stage where the Pierrot sat, patient, immobile, blindly staring. The setting sun had long since traced its dying patterns of light over the broken chairs and lumps of feathery dust that littered the auditorium and the moon had not yet risen high enough to cast its small light through the broken window set close to the roof.

The worst thing about the darkness was the cold it brought. If it hadn't been for the drop in temperature, the Pierrot would have welcomed the deepening shadows for their merciful kindnesses. Dense, intangible, they hung heavily around the stage, curtaining off the worst obscenities of dereliction and decay, but the one thing they couldn't soften was the harsh, incessant droning of the sea as it crashed hollowly against the rusting metal legs that held the rotting pier boards above water.

Life was this. The stage – the sea – the cold – the emptiness inside. The Pierrot had no memory, no past, no future, only this bleak existence, but without a past to compare, it didn't matter. Not to the Pierrot. Nothing mattered except hunger. The deep gnawing hunger that tormented mind as well as body.

The clown wanted to move. To go. To breathe in the outside air, to walk, to exercise, to get warm. To search for food and drink. But there was no point. There was no remembrance of testing or looking, only the certain knowledge that the stage exits were bolted and barred. The low apron that separated stage from auditorium, once used by the Pierrots as a platform from which to entertain the audience during scenery changes, had caved in. Ragged-

edged holes splashed across the width of the theatre like ink drops. Impenetrably black, they led straight down into the depths of the swaying sea.

Marooned. Trapped. But not forever. Not forever. There was always cunning and – the Pierrot's gloved hand reached up inside his sleeve.

A rat scurried across the far corner of the stage. One swift movement. A flash of cold steel and it lay, squealing, pinned to the splintering boards. The Pierrot watched unmoved, impassive.

Hunger and hunger alone occupied the thoughts that travelled across consciousness. Echoes sounded along the metal sub-structure. A boat moored beneath the pier. A bundle was coming. There must have been bundles before, because he knew about them. Bread. He could almost feel its soft, springy texture. Smell the warm, comforting aroma of freshly roasted meat, the hard, crisp exterior of green apples. And after food, the trapdoor would close. He would again be alone.

Had to think, to concentrate, to remember. His head hurt with the effort. Other images pushed in, dancing, crowding, never still.

Colours. Bright colours, streaks of purple, red, orange, green. Vivid, lime green. Smells, textures. Worlds where gross pink-lined shells walked on spindly legs. Music, above all music, crying, wailing, sweet, yet more bitter than any cry of torment. Of stringed instruments. Dancing – music – dancing. Crowds, a scream. Loud, long, drawn out. The Pierrot's scream.

From somewhere below, another echo. The Pierrot swallowed the tinny vibrations, digested them. The vibrations meant change, food. A way to get out? Had to get out. But not by sitting here. Had to move. Banish the paralysing cramp in arms and legs. Out there was a road. A boat. A river.

Images, no more, no less distinct than the ones that had come before flooded in. A car, a red one. A road, hard, its surface glittering with the distant lights of the car. The moon. Full, golden, set like a primary jewel in a star-dusted, clear, midnight blue sky. A ragged moon playing peek-a-boo with grey rain clouds, the air damp with the promise of rain. A man sitting in the car. A knife sinking to the hilt in soft pliant flesh. A head. A head wrapped in a coat. A head with eyes that stared, a mouth that lolled open displaying rows of teeth spattered with fillings, and a tongue. A fat, pink, white-coated tongue. But the head wasn't enough – why wasn't the head enough?

The sound of a foot striking metal. A scraping, a scrabbling. Now. Not much time. Had to move. Get out.

Slowly, painfully the Pierrot's silk-clad, freezing limbs extended forwards, they crawled awkwardly towards the rat. Its squeals were quieter, less frantic than they had been. It still lived. One steady hand on the knife handle. A sharp twist. A scurry of small furry feet hitting grey-black air, then quiet stillness.

The hand that opened the door and pushed in the bundle was close to the stage. It would be easy to reach out, greet it. Easy to slash downwards. Easy to gain freedom. To take the boat that clanked dully against the pier's skeleton, to row up river. Anchor under the bridge that carried the road. To leave the boat. Walk through the bushes, the smell of wet decaying earth and pungent greenery, strong, yet tainted. Mixed with the deeper, poisonous smells of car exhaust.

Wait – wait for what? Cars? Creeping, secretive, avoiding people, all people except one. But it could be done. The Pierrot had done it all before. Or had it been a dream? Waking, dreaming, it was the same.

The Pierrot lifted the knife. It left the splintered wood, the rat skewered halfway along the blade, a furred piece of

meat on a kebab, fleas dropping from the small carcass like gobs of fat falling from a joint on a roasting spit. Pressing the blade to the floor, the Pierrot laid a silk slippers foot against the pulsating body and pushed. The blade was suddenly bare. Kicking the rat into the off-stage depths, the Pierrot cleaned the blade between his white gloved fingers, adding stains to the old, hard, encrusted ones that already stiffened the white silk.

The door at the back. Knife at the ready. It was easy. So easy.



## Chapter Fourteen

HARRIES KNOCKED AND WALKED into Superintendent Mulcahy's office. As he'd hoped, Sergeants Collins and Joseph were sitting with him. 'Daisy Sherringham worked all her shifts at the hospital during the past two weeks, sir. I called someone I know in admin in the General.'

'Glad to see you building a network of informers, Harries,' Peter Collins interrupted.

'She also said that the two Dr Sherringtons left together at the end of every shift. They swapped duty rotas so they would be working the same hours. It's something they tried to do whenever they could.'

'No spare time for Daisy Sherringham – damn her.' Peter crashed his fist down on Mulcahy's desk.

'But we can't damn her, Sergeant,' Mulcahy's voice was ominously restrained, as he reassembled his scattered papers. 'May I remind you who we're dealing with here. Lord Holbourne is a Cabinet Minister. His daughter, Lady Joanna Holbourne is married to Richard Sherringham and Daisy Sherringham is connected through marriage to the Holbourne family.' Mulcahy's voice didn't rise one decibel but Trevor noticed the tell-tale pulse beat at the side of his temple. 'We have no evidence that links Daisy Sherringham, or indeed anyone, to the motorway murders.'

'Apart from her dreams of a headless corpse.'

'Which is inadmissible in court.' Mulcahy shuffled the last of his papers back into place. 'Perhaps you'd like to spend the next few years investigating the possibilities and probabilities of clairvoyance, Collins?'

Angry, Peter looked for and found another target. 'And you,' he turned on Trevor, 'you let this prime witness – this –'

'Robin Dart,' Trevor supplied.

'Whatever. Presumably he isn't related to anyone important, so he could still be helping us with our enquiries.'

'He told me all he knew about his sister and her relationship with a doctor we can only assume to be Sherringham. He's coming back tomorrow to make a statement,' Trevor waited for another outburst from his partner. He wasn't disappointed.

'How do you know he told you everything?'

'He had no reason to lie. I promised him an off the record interview. If we offer discretion and don't come up with the goods, word will get out. And where will that leave us with our narks?' Trevor stared obstinately at Peter. 'Besides, I had to tell him that his sister was dead. He was upset, he needed a break...'

'So do I.'

'We've had enough information in tonight to keep even you busy for the next few days, Collins.'

'I'm tired...'

'Apology accepted,' Mulcahy muttered, halting Peter in mid-torrent. 'I wouldn't say any more if I were you. We're all tired.'

'Where do you want us to start?' Trevor asked.

'Harries?'

'Sir?' Harries bounded forward eagerly.

'Search warrants. See to them.'

'Yes sir.' Harries pulled out his notebook and pencil.

'Tim Sherringham's boat – better make that a general sweep of the whole Marina just in case our geriatrics did see something. If you contact the port authorities and the yacht clubs they're generally co-operative. Say we've

reason to believe down and outs are sleeping on some of the boats.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Note on the warrant, the team are to look for anything that might tie in with Tim Sherringham or Amanda Dart. Search for any unexplained signs of occupancy.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Tim Sherringham's apartment.'

'I could probably get in there tonight,' Trevor volunteered. 'Daisy – Dr Sherringham's never blocked us before.'

'Try the lady, Joseph, but go ahead with the warrant Harries. We're looking for papers, diaries, covering prescriptions for morphine, anything that backs up Robin Dart's story.'

'Yes, sir.'

'The pier.'

'You'll need a bloody tank to get in there,' Peter warned.

'Whatever it takes, Collins. We'll do that one as soon as we can.'

'We should take Peter's friend Ben Gummer on to the pier with us.'

'Why?' Mulcahy enquired of Trevor.

'He used to work there, knows his way around it.'

'Good thinking,' Mulcahy agreed. 'We're looking for traces of occupancy...'

'And clowns,' Peter added.

'Flippancy, Collins?'

'I'm deadly serious.'

'I'm glad to hear it. And while you're at it, Harries, warrants for the hospital. In particular, Tim Sherringham's consulting rooms and office. Amanda Dart's room at the hostel, and the maternity ward. Check if anyone

remembers Tim Sherringham and Amanda Dart talking together. And check every morphine prescription against a phial number, and the number of reported breakages, and doses given to individual patients. If Amanda Dart stole drugs for her brother and Sherringham covered up for her, there has to be evidence.'

'Hospitals can be tricky, Bill. Particularly when it comes to staff nicking drugs,' Collins warned.

'Who said anything about drugs? With reference to the disappearance of Dr Timothy Sherringham and the murder of student nurse Amanda Dart and evidence, which I'm not at liberty to divulge at present, I have reason to believe that person, or persons unknown, are endangering the lives and property of the General Hospital and its staff. We wish to search the environs of the Hospital and the nurses' home for signs of breaking and entering, concealed weapons...'

'I get the message,' Trevor conceded.

'See if you can pick up any more information on Tim Sherringham's movements from his colleagues. That friend of yours, Trevor, Alan Cummins, and Judy Osbourne. And don't forget to keep pressing his brother while you're at it.'

'Does that mean the hospital searches, and the Sherringham interviews fall on us?'

'It does. Any complaints?' Bill challenged Peter.

'Not at all. I love the Sherringham mansion. It's so uplifting to see the English aristocrat at home. Even if he is American.'

'Nice to see you happy with your assignment, Collins.'

'Right, Joseph, shall we take a look at what you've gleaned from this junkie friend of yours.'

'Ex-junkie.'

Bill looked up at Harries who was hovering in the doorway. 'Warrants, Harries.'

‘Sir.’ He scuttled out.

‘First we need to track down Andy, or whoever gave Blackie those glasses.’

‘Agreed,’ Trevor concurred.

‘We may find out more if we put someone in Jubilee Street.’

‘My hair’s too short,’ Peter excused himself sharply. ‘I’m too well known among the dossers. Besides, as last year’s experience proves, I’m allergic to lice.’

‘I wasn’t thinking of you, Collins.’

‘If I must, I must,’ Trevor resigned himself.

‘See what you get for letting your hair grow,’ Peter crowed.

‘I hate to admit it, but you’re getting too well known for undercover, Joseph.’

‘A wig, make-up?’

‘This could take more than a one-night stand, if you’re going to track Andy down, and persuade him to show you how he gets on to the pier. And I’m not forgetting that Tim Sherringham disappeared and Amanda Dart was murdered after visiting Jubilee Street. It could be coincidence, or it could be they talked to the wrong people. If something nasty is going on down there, I want to know about it.’

‘If you’re talking long term, you’re talking about putting in someone new and clean,’ Trevor observed.

‘Harries?’ Peter suggested.

‘And you said your hair was too short,’ Trevor snorted.

‘He could be ex-army. Thrown out for –’ Peter looked at the ceiling for inspiration. ‘Stealing?’

‘You want to manufacture the cover story, he’s all yours. Provide Harries with background, wardrobe and briefing, the works. Drum contact points and times into

him. We don't want Harries following Sherringham into oblivion.'

'If we're talking oblivion, what about that kid, Lee, Robin Dart mentioned who went for interviews in the Grand Hotel. They were both offered jobs as hotel workers in Saudi Arabia. Then they were given medicals. He failed, but this kid Lee was taken on.'

'Nothing odd about that. Would you employ a junkie?' Peter asked.

'It's not that. He said this Lee was taken on straight away; he was to begin his training in London the next day.'

'Perhaps they're short of hotel workers in Saudi Arabia.'

'What kind of a hotel owner, particularly a foreign one who has to pay fares, does his recruiting in Jubilee Street?'

'Sounds fishy to me. Check it with the Job Centre, Joseph.' Mulcahy ordered.

'I only have Lee, no surname. Robin never knew or couldn't remember the name of the firm. Only that he was interviewed by a man called Jones.'

'The Grand may have a record, and brief Harries to be doubly careful. Sort it out tonight. Find another dogsbody for the station, Collins, and inform Harries he's now a DC.'

'Will do.'

'You going to the hospital to see Daisy Sherringham?' Mulcahy asked Trevor.

'I am.'

'You know what to ask her?'

Trevor patted the pocket that held his notebook. 'The Dart girl. Possible existence of diary. And permission to search the flat and yacht.'

'You could casually mention the sighting of Tim Sherringham and Amanda Dart on the Marina, two days

after Sherringham's disappearance. Watch her reaction. And if you come up with anything in the Sherringham apartment?"

'I'll phone you.'

'At home. I intend to be in my bed by midnight.'

'Afraid you'll turn into a pumpkin?' Peter jibed.

'I'll get more sleep than you tonight, Collins, and that's a fact. The transformation of Harries is going to take hours.' Mulcahy gloated.

'And hours.' Trevor kicked the chair he'd been sitting on under Mulcahy's desk.

'That's the happiest I've seen you all day, Joseph. Is it Collins's work load, or the thought of seeing the lady that's made your star shine?'

'Neither,' Trevor answered cautiously.

'Enjoy yourself, but don't forget the lady's business.' There was a frosty smile on Mulcahy's face.

Andy saw it fall. He was hiding under the pier, curled up tight, under the boards. He always tried to hide when the second clown came. The thin one.

He hated the thin one. He'd crept up high under the pier where he could watch the tethered boat rock against it. Sooner or later the thin clown would climb back down, sit in the boat, row away, and he would be free. Free to creep into the theatre – sit in the back row – but then it happened. While he was watching and waiting for the clown to leave.

It fell right past him. If he'd stretched out his arm, he could have touched it. It was that close. It jerked forward and glanced off a protruding bar. Doubled up, it hit the water with a resounding splash that sprayed the rocking boat with dark droplets of water. Then it sank. He looked down, it rose again, a small ball of white bobbing on the black surface of the sea, struggling towards the boat.

He shrank backwards until his back strained against the creaking boards. He was afraid. Afraid of the clowns, of being seen – of death. Wrapping his fingers tightly around the freezing ironwork, he remained still, silently watching and waiting. If he moved he might be caught. Forced to follow the neck breaking plunge of the rag-like figure that struggled in the water beneath him.

The other clown was climbing down. Andy saw the dark shape make for the boat. The thin clown moved away, back into the water. Into the shadows. A few minutes more. If he could hold on for a few minutes more, he'd be all right. He tried to forget the cramp that numbed his fingers, the fear that crawled along his veins. If the clowns went, he'd be safe again. He would crawl along the top of the iron framework, and up through the hole in the floor. Then he could sit in the back row. Put his feet up, and live like a lord.

He moved his leg slightly, seeking reassurance. It was still there. The half bottle. Tied tightly with the rags he had wound around his left thigh, under his trousers. It wouldn't slip out. He'd be all right tonight. His spirits rose in anticipation. Life was perfect. He had a bottle, somewhere quiet to drink it where he wouldn't be disturbed, where he wouldn't have to share. Tomorrow – but then who wanted to think about tomorrow. Tonight he had a bottle. He was king.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you,' Trevor said.

'If you're embarrassed because you've walked in on an argument, say so and stop pussy footing around.' Judy stormed out of the hall area of her tiny flat, leaving Trevor standing awkwardly, in the doorway.

'Have you any news of Tim?' Daisy looked up anxiously from the sofa.



‘No.’ Trevor moved from one foot to the other, and hunched into the anorak that was too thick for the time of year.

‘Are you coming in?’ Judy demanded from the open-plan kitchen area, where she’d retreated.

‘If I may, just for a minute. Thank you.’ Trevor closed the door behind him and walked into the room. He sat on one of the upright chairs that were meant to be grouped around the small pine-veneered dining table.

‘Are you going to tell us why you’ve come here at this time of night, or do we have to drag it out of you?’ Judy snapped.

‘There have been a couple of developments. It’s difficult to know whether they’re important or not. I thought Dr Sherringham,’ he gave Daisy a small smile, ‘might be able to shed some light on the evidence that’s come in.’

‘I’d be glad to help in any way I can.’ Daisy stretched out her feet, feeling for the shoes she’d kicked off earlier. She found them and rose from the sofa. ‘Are you doing anything now, Sergeant Joseph?’

‘No.’ Trevor looked wonderingly from Daisy to Judy.

‘In that case perhaps you’d like to join me at the fast food restaurant around the corner. I’m starved.’

‘I’d be delighted to,’ Trevor stammered.

‘Daisy, it’s eleven o’clock,’ Judy said heavily.

‘They’re open twenty-four seven.’ Daisy slipped on her shoes, picked up her handbag and lifted her coat from the stand. ‘Please go and see your friend, Judy. It’s crazy for everyone to disrupt their lives because of Tim’s disappearance. He wouldn’t want it and neither do I. You’re not helping me or Tim by sitting around here in the depths of despair. Besides,’ she smiled a bright artificial smile. ‘Sergeant Joseph will look after me.’

‘Of course,’ Trevor was more shaken by Daisy’s brittle energy than he had been by her distraught ravings earlier that day.

‘You’d better take a key,’ Judy rummaged in her cavernous handbag.

‘I’ll get the porter to let me in,’ Daisy opened the door.

‘I shouldn’t be late,’ Judy shouted after her. ‘I’ll be back in an hour – two at the most. You’ll stay with her until I get back?’ If Trevor hadn’t known Judy better he might have accused her of pleading.

‘I won’t leave her alone.’

‘In that case shouldn’t you be going after her?’ Judy said pointedly.

Trevor reflected there were some people you simply couldn’t reach. No matter how hard you tried.

‘Indian, Chinese, or Italian?’ Trevor asked when he caught up with Daisy on the stairs.

‘Fast food...’

‘I’m hungry too and I hate fast food,’ he lied. If he was taking her for a meal he was determined to make it a special one.

‘Whatever you like.’ The flare of nervous energy that had sustained her in the flat had burnt out, ‘as long as there are bright lights and people.’

Blessing the impulse that had made him take his own car into work that morning, he steered Daisy out of the building, into the car park and the front seat of his car. He drove steadily on to the road that led into town.

‘You said there’d been developments,’ Daisy prompted.

‘There have, but before we start I want to warn you about something. And I want you to listen carefully.’

He stopped at traffic lights and glanced across at her. Her face was pale under the reflected glow of the street lamps, the strain she was under evident in her taut facial muscles. She saw him looking at her, and turned away, burying her hands deep in the pockets of her coat.

‘Every media appeal detailing unexplained disappearances, or murders, especially a bizarre case like this, attracts what we down at the station refer to, as “the nuts”.’

‘And you think some of the developments could have been provided by these nuts?’

The lights changed and he drove on. ‘We never know until the end of a case whether the evidence we’ve gleaned is accurate, or a load of rubbish. Do you remember that woman who disappeared in February? The papers were full of it at the time.’

‘Yes.’

‘Over a two week period we were provided with fourteen definite sightings of that woman in her green sports car, all corroborated by people who didn’t know one another from Adam. Then we found her, in her car, at the bottom of the East Dock. She’d driven over the edge exactly one hour after she’d quarrelled with her husband. Her wristwatch bore that out. Most of the people who said they’d seen her were genuinely mistaken, or at least I like to think they were. They simply wanted to be of some help, and without the assistance of Bill Public we wouldn’t solve half the crimes we do. That means we have to treat everyone who walks into the station and offers information the same, be they nuts, or sensible. And it’s not always easy to tell the difference between the two.’

‘What have you heard about Tim that’s so terrible?’ Daisy enquired tersely.

Trevor turned down a side street and parked outside the neon-lit I of a Chinese Restaurant. He shut off the car

ignition before facing her. 'Does the name Amanda Dart mean anything to you?'

'Judy told me there was a rumour going around the hospital that Tim was having an affair with a nurse called Dart who worked on the maternity ward. And, no doubt, now Tim isn't here to deny it you believe every word.'

'It's what you believe that's important.'

'Tim wasn't having an affair, I would have known about it if he was.' Her voice was steady, but it took all the self-control she could muster to keep it that way.

'That's the conclusion I've come to. But there is a tie in between your husband and Amanda Dart.'

Daisy's eyes grew wide in the darkness.

'We've received information that Amanda Dart was stealing drugs from the hospital for a junkie. He confessed to putting pressure on her. He also said she mentioned a doctor who got her out of a jam with the ward sister.'

'And you think the doctor was Tim?'

'Does it sound like the sort of thing he'd do?'

'Tim would help anyone if he could. But stealing drugs warrants instant dismissal. Doctor – nurse – consultant – registrar – it makes no difference, the hospital will give them their marching orders. I can't see Tim condoning it.'

'What if he felt sorry for the girl and felt it wasn't her fault?'

Daisy shook her head. 'I doubt it.'

'Tim went to the hostel for the homeless in Jubilee Street with Amanda Dart. Does the mention of the hostel ring a bell?'

'No.'

'They were looking for her brother Robin. It was one week to the day before Tim disappeared. There's no doubt about the visit or the timing. Tim gave the priest who runs

the place a donation. A cheque drawn on his personal account for five hundred pounds.'

'That sounds like the sort of thing Tim would do,' Daisy said thoughtfully, 'but he didn't mention it to me.'

'I hate having to ask this. But were you and Tim close? I mean did you discuss everything?'

'Everything important,' Daisy insisted. 'We've lived together for years. We've never kept secrets from one another.'

'Were you particularly busy the week before Tim disappeared?'

'No more than usual.'

'Did Tim often go off by himself?'

'Are you suggesting that Tim sneaked away from me whenever he could to sleep with other women?' Daisy's voice was pitched alarmingly high.

'I'm trying to find out what he did in his spare time. Any clue, any hint as to what he did when he wasn't at the hospital or with you, might help us find him.'

'Tim is dead.'

'Your husband and Amanda Dart were seen standing together on a berthed yacht in the Marina the day after he disappeared.' Trevor flung the suspect evidence at her.

Daisy took a deep breath. 'Does that come from one of your nuts?'

'It comes from a retired army intelligence officer, and a middle-aged woman. Two totally unconnected people.'

'Have you searched the Marina?'

'Not yet. We're in the process of getting a warrant.'

'But you think they were standing on board the *Freedom*? Our boat,' she explained, 'you saw a photograph of it.'

'The boat wasn't identified.'

'I want to go there now.'

'I thought you were hungry?'

‘You’ve just taken my appetite away, Sergeant Joseph.’

Trevor didn’t argue with Daisy. He turned the ignition key, slid the car into gear and ran through a mental check list of the equipment he kept in the boot of his car. Torch, ropes, basic first aid kit, blanket, pick axe – that wouldn’t be much use on a boat, unless you wanted to sink it in a hurry.

He headed for the centre of town, and the Marina. Then realisation splashed over him. He could almost hear Mulcahy’s broad northern accent.

“What do you think this is lad, a bloody picnic? It’s a murder enquiry. There are two dead bodies cluttering up the morgue.”

Dead bodies and he was driving off to a deserted Marina in the middle of the night with a hysterical woman in tow. Much as he admired Daisy Sherringham he couldn’t call her anything else at that moment. But if Tim Sherringham was alive, and they found him, it would be worth it – wouldn’t it? He could watch someone else’s happiness even if he hadn’t managed to engineer his own.

Judy Osbourne glanced in the mirror of her car more from habit than any fear of being followed. Jealous wives didn’t have the other woman followed. Not in this day and age. There’d be little point in indulging in such a wasteful exercise. A quick visit to a solicitor, a petition for divorce, a waiting period, “irretrievable breakdown of marriage.” That was it. Short, sweet road to freedom, for the partners concerned. Not for the other woman. Other women could, if they weren’t careful, find themselves offered the vacant position of wife. And that was the last thing she wanted, or needed. Her life suited her perfectly just the way it was.

She enjoyed the fringe benefits, the lack of responsibility, that went with the role of mistress. The

excitement of private assignations, the constant struggle for time that made her wring every moment she spent with her lover dry. The pleasure of the presents he lavished on her whenever he had a pang of conscience. Swift, silent lovemaking, all the more passionate for its urgency. Whispered endearments in the dark, furtive pressing of hands, the exchange of fleeting knowing smiles on the rare occasions when their public lives overlapped.

She liked having a secret life. To be able to love whole-heartedly without having to subjugate career, ambition and personality to the mind-crushing, tedious daily grind of domesticity. When she woke in the morning there was always delicious anticipation. Would today be one of “their” days? Would they be able to snatch an hour or two that coincided? Any day could be transformed into a combination of birthday and Christmas. And the best part of all was not knowing when it would happen.

The stunted apple tree that hung low over the old stone wall was her signal to slow the car. She dropped her speed, turned left and bumped her car gently along a twisting path. A tiny cottage clung precariously to the cliff face ahead. She didn’t doubt that one stormy night a winter high sea would sweep it away – if the cliff didn’t crumble first. But not tonight. Tonight the sea below lay calm and placid, glittering with the reflected glow of the moon.

She parked the car between two high, dry-stone walls that conveniently shielded both parking area and cottage from view of the rare determined rambler. Unless you knew the exact location of the retreat you could walk the path for hours and still miss it, which was precisely why she’d asked him to buy the place for her soon after they’d met.

She locked the car and walked down the rough-hewn steps cut into the cliff. A light shone ahead. He’d arrived before her. That didn’t surprise her. He lived closer to the

cottage than she did and he'd sounded impatient when he'd telephoned. If she hadn't known him better, she might have even said he'd sounded upset when she'd told him she couldn't make it, and almost hysterical when she'd phoned later to say she could meet him after all.

But in the two years she'd known him she'd never seen him other than calm and self-possessed – except when they made love. Daisy's presence had probably unnerved her. The last thing she wanted was anyone, least of all Daisy, discovering the identity of her lover.

She walked up to the front door, her thoughts centred on the deep, double bed in the cosy bedroom. They had a couple of hours. The police officer would take care of Daisy. The idiot was clearly besotted with her.

The door opened. Richard stood in a yellow pool of light, his auburn hair tousled. Uncombed since he'd been in her flat earlier. His suit was rumpled, as if he'd slept in it. His shirt front was stained, judging by the smell, with whisky. He looked like a man at the end of his tether.

'Seeing you earlier, and not being able to touch you, was hell.' He reached out to her with trembling hands. The stubbled cheek that pressed against hers was damp with tears. 'No matter what Daisy says, Tim's not dead,' he insisted with an intensity that terrified her. 'He's not. He's alive – I know he's alive.' He gripped her shoulders and shook her savagely. 'Joanna's no help. But she's never given a damn for anyone other than herself. We've done nothing but quarrel since Tim disappeared. He's the only family I have. You know I don't love Joanna. I never have. Judy, I'm going to divorce her. I'm going to marry you. Darling...' he clasped her in his arms.

Judy stood silent, her body meshed tight to his in the doorway. Unable to move she returned his embrace simply because he left her no other option. She loved him but she



loved him strong – not weak – and if she could have walked away she would have.

Finally, when he became a little quieter, she wrapped her arm around his waist and led him into the cottage. He was on the verge of a breakdown. Reluctantly she relinquished all thoughts of the double bed and remembered the drugs that were locked in her bag in the boot of the car. The policeman would have to stay with Daisy. She'd telephone them at her flat later and explain that her friend was ill.

Richard needed her and she'd stay with him, for tonight at least. He had to be tranquilised, put to bed. Gentle, but firm handling. And she wasn't going to botch it as she had done with Daisy earlier that day. Damn Tim for getting himself lost – did he have any idea of the mess he'd left in his wake?

## Chapter Fifteen

TREVOR SWEEPED THE PORT side of the *Freedom* with his torch beam before leaving the boarding ladder and stepping on to the deck. He turned and extended a hand to Daisy who climbed up after him.

‘Is this how you left it?’

‘It looks untouched,’ she whispered without knowing why.

He flashed a light on the doors that led below. ‘How do we get into the cabin?’

‘We leave a key taped to the bottom of the mast.’

‘Not very wise,’ Trevor the police officer commented.

‘Tim always said if anyone really wanted to get in, they’d take an axe to the door.’

‘Most break-ins are the work of amateurs, and amateurs are notorious for taking advantage of the opportunities people put their way. Like keys taped to masts.’ He walked around the bulge of the cabin and shone his torch over the starboard side of the boat. ‘Here, hold this,’ he handed her the torch, directing the beam towards the door handle. He stood under the sheltered portico that shielded the cabin entrance from the weather and pressed the handle. The door swung open.

‘Are you sure you always lock it?’ he whispered.

‘Positive. It’s the last thing Tim and I check every time we leave the boat...’

‘Quiet!’ Trevor pushed her hand down, directing the torch beam at the floor. He fumbled in his pocket, brought out a handkerchief, and wrapped it around his fingers. He recalled the mutilated bodies in the mortuary. The mind

that conceived those horrors had to be sick and for the first time in his professional life he, who usually baulked at carrying firearms, wished he'd had the foresight to book out a gun.

'Stay here, until I call you,' he murmured. 'When you go in don't touch anything. Is there a light in the cabin?'

'The switch is to the right of the door.'

He pushed the door gingerly with his foot. It swung open. The first thing that struck him was the foul stench. Far stronger than the closed-in musty smell of damp upholstery and wet floor that he associated with boats. He fumbled with his shrouded hand for the switch and flicked it on.

He stepped back, treading on Daisy; pushing her aside he ran to the rail and vomited the coffee he'd drunk at the station.

'Don't go in there,' he gasped hoarsely as soon as he could speak. The plea came too late. With the torch still switched on, hanging limply at her side, Daisy stepped into the illuminated doorway.

The cabin beyond her was a charnel house. Red blotches, shaded with darker clots were splattered over floor, walls and ceiling, a random decoration of gore. A severed hand lay on the Formica table, its end cut clean, the fingers and palm upturned in a bizarre parody of an Art Deco table ornament.

'Daisy...' still nauseous, he stumbled towards her. The light in the cabin cut and they were plunged into darkness. He made a grab for the one remaining pool of light. The torch that hung in Daisy's hand. The moment he closed his hand over Daisy's, something gripped his left shoulder from behind.

He screamed as an excruciating pain shot into his arm, paralysing it. Iron fingers closed around his right wrist, wrenching his arm up high behind his back. Forced away

from Daisy, he tried to call out to her. But no sound issued from his lips.

His legs were kicked out from under him. The vice-like grip intensified. A crack rent the air. And through the grey shock waves of pain he knew he'd heard the sound of his own bones breaking.

'Daisy. Get to the dinghy... go!'

Daisy stood transfixed before him, her shadowy figure outlined behind the glow of the torch. It was the last thing he saw before he was thrown on to the deck.

His mind wavered in and out of consciousness. He tried to focus, needing to know Daisy was safe. A white-painted face flitted in and out of the torch light. The make-up was streaky, the black outlines around the eyes running into greasy pools that merged with the red mouth. A clown's face – the murdering clown. And it was close to Daisy.

He had to make an effort – save her – there was no one else. He fought to move his arms. He couldn't. He pushed the soles of his shoes against the deck, arched his back, struggled to rise and collapsed. Landing awkwardly on his right arm he tumbled into a deeper blackness. One without even the small consolation of a flickering torch-beam to lighten its gloom.

Robin Dart hadn't been cheered by the two drinks he'd downed before closing time. In fact, they'd had the opposite effect. Depression had settled and he'd become preoccupied by his own guilty thoughts.

Dead! Amanda was dead. She'd led such a pathetic, miserable life. He should have done something for her; instead, all he'd ever brought her was pain – and trouble.

'Mate, what you doing?'

He turned to Jock, almost surprised to see him sitting next to him in the van.

‘You’ve driven past my stable,’ Jock shouted.

‘Sorry.’ Robin slammed on the brakes.

Jock climbed down from the van. ‘Rehearsal for the new play tomorrow morning. Eight sharp.’

‘I’ll be there.’ Robin drove away before Jock could say any more. Jock was a reasonable actor and an all right bloke. But he didn’t want to talk to anyone. He wanted to think. To remember. He didn’t know how he was going to live with himself after what he’d done to Amanda. And tomorrow – he hadn’t told Jock, but he’d skive off. Keep his promise to the sergeant and return to the police station to make his statement. He had to see Amanda – or what was left of her. And much as he didn’t want to, he’d have to talk to his brother. He should have asked that copper where he was staying. They’d have to arrange Amanda’s funeral.

He parked the van outside his bed-sit, and looked at the blank, dark window that was his. The place that had pleased him that morning seemed seedy, shabby. He had nothing to tie him to this town any more. He could leave any time he wanted. Go elsewhere. Find another job.

His rent was due next week. He wouldn’t pay it. He’d move on, find some place else. Where he wouldn’t have to walk past the General and see the nurses in the uniform Amanda had worn.

He slid back the door and stepped down on to the road. He locked the door and walked around the van to check the other doors. He was closing the back door Jock always left open when he heard a voice.

‘I got what you want.’ A youngish bald man tapped him on the shoulder. Robin thought he’d seen him before. The pub? Jubilee Street?

‘Don’t want anything.’ Robin used the rejection that had been drummed into him at the rehabilitation centre. As he stopped to let the man pass he thought – what difference

would one more time make? Amanda was dead. He had nothing going for him. A small dose would give him a good night's sleep. He could handle one fix, and be bright-eyed and breezy for whatever tomorrow brought.

A hand covered his mouth. A handkerchief was forced between his teeth. He gagged on the cloth, tried to struggle, but was swept off his feet. The street lights moved at a crazy angle. He was thrust into darkness. Black fetid air, heavy with the smell of petrol, cloyed his nostrils. Choking, he gasped for air drawing the cloth further into his mouth.

'Keep him still.' The warning was whispered. He was thrust face downwards on to a mattress. The more he struggled, the more cushioned pressure was exerted between his shoulder blades. Someone was tugging at his sleeve. Rolling it up. He felt the prick of a needle. They were giving him a free shot. Nothing like a cheap fix. He should thank them for it. Thank them – thank them – thank them...

His head was spinning. Thoughts whirled, merging into one with centrifugal force. There was a confusion of noise – a car engine – music...

He was sitting in the road looking at the back of the van driving off. What was he doing sitting in the road?

Had to get up. Go to bed. Had he drunk that much? Had to lie down. That would stop him puking his insides up – had to lie down – he reached out for the gate post, missed it and fell. It took him a long time to fall. A long, long time.

'Name?'

'Stacko.'

'Short for?'

'Stephen Harries.'

Peter Collins reached for his coffee. 'Your story?'

‘My own, sir.’

‘I trust you can remember your life until the day you left school, Harries?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Followed by – come on Harries, from the top, one more time.’

‘After school I joined up, served three years.’

‘Which regiment?’

‘What you want to know for?’

‘I like the suspicion, Harries, sounds authentic.’ Peter finished his coffee. ‘And if you’re pressed?’

‘Regiment’s irrelevant...’

‘Doesn’t matter, not irrelevant. Big words mean education in Jubilee Street. And the junkies have a monopoly on that. We don’t want to be mistaken for a junkie, do we, Harries?’

‘No, sir,’ Harries agreed, tired of being patronised.

‘Where did you spend most of your service life?’

‘Germany.’

‘Doing what?’

‘None of your damned business.’

‘And if you’re pressed.’

‘Bit of this, bit of that. Marketing in stolen goods.’

‘For which?’

‘I was put in military prison.’

‘Which explains the haircut. But you start growing your hair tomorrow.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And then we may give you more little jobs like this one.’

‘Does that mean I’ll be permanently attached to plain clothes from now on, sir?’

‘One thing at a time, Harries.’ Peter unconsciously aped Bill’s accent. ‘How come a big timer like you ended up in Jubilee Street?’

‘Came straight from prison to see a girlfriend. She’d moved, I had nowhere to stay. Social Services messed up my records. I’ll only be in Jubilee Street a night or two, soon be moving on to something better.’

‘Perfect, just the right hint of cockiness. And with a story like that you don’t have to turn up in filthy clothes. They wash them in prison. Lucky – lucky you. The times Sergeant Joseph and myself have crawled as well as stunk.’

The telephone buzzed. ‘Mulcahy’s office,’ Peter snapped.

‘Call from the General Hospital for you, Sergeant Collins.’

‘Put it through.’

‘Is that Sergeant Peter Collins?’

‘Speaking. Who is this?’

‘John Adams, Sergeant. I’m a porter at the General. Dr Sherringham asked me to phone you. Wants you to come to Casualty right away.’

‘Which Dr Sherringham?’

‘Dr Daisy. Dr Tim’s missing.’

‘This is the bloody police station. Why does Daisy Sherringham want to see me?’

‘A police officer has been hurt. Sergeant Joseph.’

‘What happened to him?’ Peter’s heart thundered a tattoo. His mouth went dry. Joseph – the fool was soft. He’d been telling him that for years.

‘He was attacked, sir. Dr Daisy is with him now.’

‘How bad is he?’

‘That’s what Doctor Daisy’s trying to find out.’

‘I’m on my way.’ He slammed down the receiver. Joseph was supposed to be having a quiet chat with his lady love. A quick check round her flat. A scrabble in Tim Sherringham’s desk. How had that turned into a rough house?



‘Bad news, sir?’

Peter turned to Harries.

‘Sir?’ Harries was stunned by the look on Peter’s face. Like everyone else at the station he had assumed Peter Collins incapable of feeling any emotion.

‘I have to go.’ Peter rose to his feet and patted his pockets for his car keys.

‘About the briefing, sir,’ Harries followed Peter to the door.

‘You’ll be fine, Harries.’

‘Do I come into town on the ten-thirty train tomorrow?’

‘Whatever, you’re on your own. But don’t forget to keep contact,’ Peter ran outside.

Harries walked back into Mulcahy’s office and looked around to see if he’d left anything. He recalled the bodies in the mortuary. The vicious fights he’d helped break up in the dock area. The junkies he’d locked in the cells who’d given their address as Jubilee Street. Peter Collins was right. He was on his own. For the first time in his life – totally alone.

‘Trevor Joseph?’ Peter demanded, as he stormed into Casualty.

‘Are you Sergeant Collins?’ the porter asked from behind the reception desk.

‘Yes.’

‘He’s in the emergency theatre – hey – you can’t go in there!’ John shouted after his retreating figure.

‘It’s all right, John. I’ll see to Sergeant Collins.’ Daisy pushed through the swing doors. She stood, gowned, masked, gloved, waiting for Peter to reach her.

‘How is he?’

‘There’s no damage six to eight weeks rest won’t cure. Dislocated right shoulder. A bone break just above the right wrist. Severe bruising on left shoulder, cuts, scrapes, black eye, that’s about it.’ Beckoning Peter she went into an ante-room, peeled off the rubber gloves and mask and tossed them into a bin. She washed her hands at the sink. Her face was bloodless with exhaustion, but her dark eyes were glittering.

In that instant Peter saw the Daisy that had caused Trevor to lose his head. If the moment, and the place had been different, he might even have taken time out to cast an eye over her himself.

‘Can I see him?’ he was breathing easier than he had done since he’d received the telephone call. Hurt! Trevor was only hurt. Every copper expects to get beaten up from time to time. Part of the job.

‘Soon, when they’ve finished working on him they’ll take him to a side ward. I heard you shouting, so I thought I’d better get out here before John called in the heavy squad.’

‘What happened?’ Peter’s relief was rapidly dissipating into anger. He wanted to lash out and arrest whoever had put Trevor in the hospital.

‘Trevor drove me to the Marina. He said someone had seen Tim and Amanda Dart standing on a boat...’

‘They were nuts.’

‘I thought perhaps they might have been watching our boat, the *Freedom*.’

‘And you and Trevor went there in the middle of the night, to take a look?’

‘It wasn’t very bright of us. But we only wanted to see if there were any signs of the boat being used.’

‘And were there?’

She gripped the sink tightly behind her back. ‘The cabin looked like a battlefield. There was blood

everywhere – and a hand lying in the middle of the table. There might have been more, I only had a moment to look. Someone cut the lights.'

'Someone was on the boat with you?'

'Yes. I was holding the torch. Trevor, at least I think it was Trevor, tried to take it off me. Then the clown jumped him.'

'A clown?'

'I saw the face in the torchlight. The make-up was streaked. It looked like days old grease paint, but it was definitely meant to be a clown.' Daisy screwed her fists tightly. She tried to remain calm, rational. Peter Collins wanted the facts from her, no more. No hysteria, no emotion, no embellishments. She'd put him down as a cold bastard the first time they'd met, now she was certain of her diagnosis. 'After the lights went out there was a lot of banging and scuffling, I tried to shine the torch, see what was happening. Trevor was fighting with the clown. I wanted to help, but everything moved so fast. There was a loud crack.' She bit her lip. 'I thought it was a gun shot, now I realise it must have been Trevor's arm breaking. I shone the torch on the clown's face. He was holding Trevor in front of him. He tossed him aside – I've never seen such strength. It was incredible.'

'What happened next?'

'Trevor had screamed, I knew he was hurt, I looked for him and found him lying unconscious in front of the cabin door. I knelt on the deck beside him. Then –' she shuddered. 'I saw a pair of feet in thin slippers with dirty white pom-poms and realised the clown was standing in front of me.'

'An idiot dressed as a clown breaks Trevor's arm, throws him on to the deck and you check on Trevor instead of running like a bat out of hell?' Peter stared at her in disbelief.

'I'm a doctor. Trevor had been hurt.'

'Did the clown attack you?'

'That's the peculiar part, he didn't. The torch light was on Trevor and I concentrated on him. I knew I wouldn't stand a chance against the clown. Not after seeing what he'd done to Trevor. The light was shining on the clown's black silk trousers. He was standing over both of us. Although I was petrified, I carried on checking Trevor over. I resorted to that ridiculous childish ploy, "if you shut your eyes it will go away" and it worked. One minute the silk slippers with their preposterous white pom-poms were in front of me, the next they weren't.'

'You didn't see the clown again?'

'No. I heard a small engined boat moving away from the *Freedom*. I panicked because I thought it was the one we'd used. Trevor was alive, but injured. The power was off, and presumably the radio. Trevor was in shock. We had the emergency flares, but I didn't want to go into the cabin to get them. And I didn't have to. Trevor came round a few minutes later. With my help he managed to crawl off the deck. Our boat was tied to the *Freedom*, where we'd left it. I used my mobile to call the ambulance service.'

'And brought Trevor here and patched him up.'

'The duty doctor was dealing with the casualties of a pub glassing,' she explained. 'But this theatre was free. Trevor insisted John call you and the team at the station. They said they'd send forensics out to the boat. When the duty doctor finished with the glassing victims he took over from me. The rest you know.'

'You're quite a woman.' Peter leaned against the wall and stared at her. 'You remained cool...'

'Cool nothing,' she said abruptly. 'On the boat I was too scared to run.'

'Not many people...'

She recalled the first time they'd met, 'Compliments from you I cannot take.'

'We're about to move him, Daisy,' Mike Edmunds called from the theatre.

Daisy opened the door, 'Don't upset him,' she warned Peter.

Trevor was stretched out on a trolley, swathed in white sheets and bandages. He smiled weakly when he saw Peter follow Daisy into the room.

'You're going to be fine,' Daisy told him.

'So they tell me,' he slurred, the painkillers he'd been given affecting his voice.

'Your right arm's fractured above the wrist, the rest is trivial.'

'I wish it felt trivial,' Trevor muttered. 'My shoulder hurts like hell.'

'Cursing already. You must be recovering,' Peter quipped in his usual sardonic fashion. The sight of Trevor injured had shaken him more than he would have cared to admit. He loathed hospitals and sickness of any kind. They reminded him of his own mortality.

'Your right shoulder was dislocated. We,' she glanced at Mike, 'had fun putting it back. And Sergeant Collins should take a look at your left shoulder.'

'Not likely, his idea of doctoring only goes as far as the whisky bottle,' Trevor protested.

'This shoulder comes under the category of police evidence.' Daisy looked at Peter. 'Help me prop him up.' Peter slid his arm behind Trevor's back. 'Not too far,' Daisy warned. 'There, at the back of his shoulder.'

'Some bruising,' Peter agreed. 'What did you fall on?'

'Trevor fell on nothing,' Daisy answered. 'The deck was flat. If you look in front there's one more bruise. They're finger marks. That's where the clown grabbed him.'

Peter looked from Daisy to Trevor in disbelief. 'No one can grip with that kind of force.'

'That clown could,' Trevor winced. 'And if you two have quite finished poking me about, would you mind letting me lie down?'

Daisy pulled a pillow off a shelf behind her and pushed it beneath Trevor's head. Peter lowered him back on to the trolley.

'Comfortable?' Daisy asked.

'Wonderfully. My entire body aches as if it has gone twenty rounds with a big ape. I can't feel my arms. And I'd be happier if my shoulders weren't part of me.'

'Aren't we being brave?' Peter mocked.

'Did Daisy tell you all of it?' Trevor asked Peter.

'She told me enough. What possessed you to go tearing off, unarmed, in the middle of the night?'

'You were the one who called the Marina witnesses nuts. Besides, how was I to know there was a gorilla on board that boat? Whatever it was, it was strong. Unarmed combat skills were useless. Before I knew where I was he'd swept me off my feet, snapped my arm, and thrown me on the deck. It was as much as I could do to get in one good throat chop. I swear I connected, but whether I did or I didn't, it didn't slow him down.'

'So what have we got?' Peter asked. 'King Kong on the loose in a clown costume?'

'Sounds about right.' Trevor surveyed his bandages. The local anaesthetic was beginning to wear off. He was coming round to a fuzzy and painful awareness.

'Time the patient had another painkiller,' Daisy said briskly.

'Want me to give it to him?' Mike asked.

'I'll manage.'

'Then I'll love you and leave you. I've a theatre date at seven tomorrow.'

‘Thanks for coming down.’ Daisy lifted a syringe from a trolley.

‘For you, Daisy, any time.’ He looked at Trevor. ‘This time tomorrow you’ll be feeling more human, Sergeant.’

‘Thank you for the optimism,’ Trevor replied.

‘Thank you,’ Peter added gruffly.

‘All you have to do is roll over on to your –’ Daisy looked at Trevor, ‘left side?’ she suggested.

‘Must I go through this indignity?’

‘If you want it to stop hurting.’ She pulled back the blankets, swabbed his bare buttock and slid in the needle.

‘Admit it,’ Peter joked, ‘you only did this to get out of the workload Bill dumped on us.’

‘From where I’m lying that workload looks good.’ He shifted on to his back. ‘I know my arms aren’t much good, but if I took it easy tomorrow, I could come in the day after...’

‘Like hell you can.’ Peter looked to Daisy for confirmation.

‘You need at least three weeks complete rest and another three of light activity before you even think of returning to work,’ Daisy concurred.

‘No one’s indispensable, Joseph. Tomorrow, I’ll organise that search of the pier.’

‘Why the pier?’ Daisy folded the blankets back over Trevor.

‘Because a drunken down and out thinks he saw a clown there. And after tonight’s episode we can’t afford to laugh off any clown sightings, even by nuts.’

‘There’ve been clown sightings on the motorway too,’ Trevor added. ‘Close to the spot where the bodies were found.’

‘Then that clown we saw tonight murdered Tim.’ Daisy’s hand shook as she disposed of the syringe.

‘Your husband is missing,’ Peter interposed. He disliked emotional scenes almost as much as he disliked hospitals and sickness.

‘Tim’s dead.’ Daisy turned her back on Trevor and Peter. ‘The cabin...’ unable to continue she buried her face in her hands.

Trevor stared uneasily at her back. ‘We didn’t see Tim in that cabin,’ he ventured. ‘That hand was small. Those people on the Marina, they were elderly, their eyesight was failing. They couldn’t possibly be certain it was Tim they saw. Not at that distance.’

‘The forensic team should have something to report by tomorrow,’ Peter said abruptly.

‘And if you find Tim?’ Daisy asked.

‘You’ll be the first to know. I take it Trevor’s going to be here for a few days?’

‘This is the NHS, not a rich man’s clinic, we’re stretched to the limit. A broken arm rates overnight, no more.’

‘It’s four now.’ Peter looked at his watch. ‘What time can I come back to pick him up?’

‘He’ll need looking after,’ Daisy warned.

‘I’ll stick him in my flat. The woman who cleans for me...’

‘No,’ Trevor roused himself from his drug-laced stupor. ‘Him, is going back to his own place.’

‘Stubborn, bad-tempered creature isn’t he?’ Peter’s joke fell leadenly on Daisy’s ears. She jerked her head in the direction of the door. Peter followed her out.

‘I could pull a few strings and put him in one of the cubicles we set aside for staff. Or I could get him admitted to Richard’s clinic.’

‘The hospital would be better.’

‘I’ll do what I can.’



‘I have to get back to the station. I’ve a million and one things to arrange.’

‘Don’t worry about Trevor.’

‘I’ll call in his flat and pick up his toothbrush and anything else he’s likely to need.’

‘You’d better go in and say goodbye. Tell him I’ll be back with a porter.’

‘I will.’

Peter watched her turn the corner of the corridor then made a mental list of things to be done. He put them in order of priority. That bloody clown had to be caught for a start. The boat? The pier? Where did they go if the lunatic wasn’t on either? He’d find out if they had enough men to stake out the Marina, and the motorway. It might be as well to check all the psychiatric wards. Whoever or whatever the clown was, from Trevor and Daisy’s description, it was insane. And Harries – he realised he’d left him in mid-briefing. The last thing he had shouted to him was “keep contact” but he hadn’t even arranged contact times and places. If Trevor was still shouting for a piece of the action in a couple of days, he could take over that job.

He rubbed his eyes. So much to do and he was on his knees. What was it Bill had said? “You’re a policeman, and everyone knows they don’t need to eat or sleep.”

Well this one would sleep. Just as soon as he was sure the forensic search of the yacht was underway and he’d talked to Harries. If he tried to keep this pace up for much longer, Daisy Sherringham would have another patient to doctor.

## Chapter Sixteen

FOR THIRTY YEARS BEN Gummer had stuck to the same routine. Winter, summer, day, night, it varied only when major events, such as a family death, intruded.

He kept the pub open until the last customer struggled out. Sometimes it was three, sometimes it was four in the morning. He saw the last of them through the doors, locked up, then rubbed his hands in anticipation of his favourite time of the day.

He cleared the spilt beer and glasses from the table nearest the bar, gave it a quick wipe over with the bar rag, then emptied the tills on to its scarred and chipped surface before cashing up, bagging the takings and locking them in the safe hidden behind the massive Edwardian mirror that hung over the bar. The closing of the safe door marked the end of work for the day. The dirty glasses, tables and floor would be seen to by the cleaning woman who came in at eight.

He usually finished as dawn broke, in spring and summer. But whether it was light or dark he poured his only stiff drink of the day. A tumbler full of brandy, laced with a raw egg. He never drank spirits while the pub was open. He'd seen too many landlords come a cropper by going down that road. Beer he could take in vast quantities, and did, matching his customers, glass for glass, talking, socialising, but never incapacitated. Brandy was different. Which was why he kept it for first thing in the morning, or rather last thing in his night.

He took his time over the drink and, when it was finished, he left his dirty glass among the others, and let

the dogs out through the back door. He'd bred German Shepherds ever since he'd smuggled his first dog out of Germany in the sixties. While the dogs ran over the beach he cooked and ate his breakfast. A large slab of steak accompanied by a mound of fried, left-over lunch potatoes, the lot smothered in brown sauce. He wolfed it down sitting on a stool in the pub kitchen.

Leaving his grease-laden plate and frying pan where they lay, he whistled the dogs in. Once they returned he locked the back door and went to bed, staying there until the pub re-opened at ten-thirty. Any sleep he missed out on, he caught up during the quiet time in the late afternoon when he left a barmaid in charge.

Publicans' hours didn't suit everyone, but they suited him. They hadn't been to the liking of the women he'd married – both had left him within months of the weddings, and he clung to the fallacy that they'd deserted him because of the hours he kept, rather than his own shortcomings.

He had never mourned the loss of his wives, only the vacancy they left in his bed. He missed his afternoon "sessions" but as the years passed, and ever-thickening layers of fat settled over his pallid body, he'd found it harder and harder to find a woman to share his bed for one night, let alone on a more permanent basis.

When he'd been young and worked the pier – strange how often he'd thought of the pier since Peter Collins had brought it up a few nights ago – women had been easy to find. The only problem he'd had to cope with then was how to fit them all in. They'd buzzed round his booth, like flies on dead fish. At times he couldn't move out on to the boards for them. Women of all shapes and sizes, with their thick red lipstick, heavy perfume, slim legs and sheer nylons – each and every one of them came to his mind in lustfully graphic detail.

He pushed his sauce-smeared plate aside, and lit a cigarette. The images of women blurred, and were supplanted by a sudden vision of the unmade bed that waited for him upstairs. There was nothing quite as lonely as a double bed when you needed a woman, he reflected baldly. Some memories were definitely best left in the past.

He went to the back door. It wouldn't hurt to take a look around the bar later. His age wasn't that much against him. Men were always walking out on women, couples split up at all stages of life. It would be good if he could find a fairly reliable and grateful woman to share his bed. Someone not too pernicky, who knew how, and when, to laugh.

He whistled to the dogs through the open door. Stupid brutes. He could hear them barking down on the beach. They knew the routine as well as he did. They could stay out for as long as it took him to eat his meal. No more. If they pushed their luck, he'd chain them up outside for the rest of the day.

He whistled again. Shorter and more irate this time, but the barking continued unabated. Furious, he stepped outside, gasping when the raw, salt-laden air seared into his lungs and bit through the holes in his vest. He called out angrily. He could see the blasted animals. Down alongside the pier, pulling and playing with something that had been washed up on the tide. He'd have to dry the stupid mutts.

'Edna, Cyril!' He'd named the dogs after his least favourite set of in-laws. He got a kick out of telling his ex-wife that he enjoyed bullying anything with those names. He whistled again. Still they ignored him.

The cold spurred him on. He moved through the beer garden to the gate. Edna had something between her teeth. A long dark streak against the white crest of the waves. He squinted at it through the pale misty dawn light.

He scuffed his way across the soft sand. The dogs wouldn't leave it alone. It had to be meat. Perhaps a sheep fallen over the cliffs. He moved closer. Edna was fighting with Cyril over a bone – a long bone. He shouted again, Cyril recognised the anger in his master's voice and sloped to heel. But Ben had to wade knee-deep into the sea to get Edna. He caught her roughly by the collar and pulled her sharply away. Then he saw the parcel, sodden bread billowing out into the water, and a leg of roasted meat.

He picked it up to make sure. It was a leg of lamb; or rather what had been roast lamb before the dogs had got at it. Then he saw the knife, long, slim, sunk to the hilt between the bones. And pinioned to the leg by the knife blade was a black sleeve ornamented by a single white pom-pom. Just like the ones the Pierrots used to wear when he'd worked the pier all those years ago.

Trevor edged his way warily out of sleep. Around him buzzed a cacophony of unfamiliar noises; the distant ring of telephones; the rattle of trolleys over hard floors; the clink of glasses and water jugs; muffled voices speaking in low, muted tones. A radio played softly, classical music, a piece he didn't recognise. He opened his eyes, and saw Daisy sitting in an armchair next to his bed.

'How do you feel?' she asked.

'I don't know – yet.' He moved slightly and grimaced in pain.

'If I were you, I'd start slowly. Leave the break-dancing and weight lifting until next week.'

He lay quietly, remembering the events of the night before. The clown – the boat – Daisy – Peter – Daisy? 'Have you been sitting here all night?'

'I left you in the care of the ward sister at four this morning. I just called back to see how you're getting on.'

'What time is it?'

‘Two.’

‘I shouldn’t have slept so long and you shouldn’t have gone to all this trouble. I’ll get up...’

‘Later,’ she reverted to the brisk bedside manner he recognised from the time he’d broken his legs. ‘And you’re not putting me to any trouble. Sergeant Collins and I agreed last night that you should be moved in here so you could be nursed properly. Fortunately they’re not pushed for beds at the moment so you can stay put. At least for today.’

‘Peter suggested I stay here?’

‘He did,’ she confirmed.

‘I’ll kill him.’

‘You’ll have a chance to kill him later.’

‘He’s coming here?’

‘He rang about an hour ago. He told me to tell you that both the boat and the pier have been searched. There have been “more developments” which suggests that the police have moved into the property market, and he’d call in as soon as he was free. But important things first. What do you want for breakfast?’

‘Do I have to eat?’

‘You’re not hungry?’

‘No.’

‘Then I’ll get a nurse to wash you.’

‘Oh no you don’t. I’m fit enough to stagger to the bathroom. That is a bathroom door?’ he asked.

‘It is. This room is usually used by VIP’s.’

‘I’m not used to preferential treatment.’

‘Injuries received in the line of duty. You are trying to find Tim.’

‘Not that I’ve made much headway. All I seem to have done is get myself into a right mess.’ He lifted his head from the pillow and looked around for a robe.

‘At least allow me to help you up.’ She left her chair, and lifted down a striped hospital robe that hung on the back of the door.

‘I don’t think I could lift either arm high enough to stop you doing whatever you wanted.’ He gritted his teeth.

Daisy sat next to him. ‘If I slide my arm round your back, it would give you the leverage you need to get up.’

‘This is ridiculous,’ he protested, when she leaned over him.

‘No more than the performance we had to get you into bed in the first place. And before you look, I asked the nurses to find your underwear to spare your blushes.’

‘Thank you,’ his embarrassment mounted with each revelation she made.

With her help he managed to swing his legs out of the bed. She draped the dressing gown over his shoulders. He clutched the edge of the mattress with his left hand. His head was swimming, he felt faint and nauseous. It would have been bliss just to fall back, and lie still.

‘Are you all right there for a moment?’ Daisy relaxed her hold on him.

‘I think so,’ he said weakly.

She disappeared and came back with a black plastic sack and white insulation tape.

‘You’re bagging me and putting me out with the rubbish?’

‘That will come later if you give us any trouble.’ She lifted his right arm gently and slid the plastic bag over the plaster cast, taping the ends firmly against his bare skin. ‘If you’re careful not to soak this arm, the bag will protect against any accidental splashes. Ready for the great trek?’

‘As I’ll ever be.’ The bathroom door suddenly seemed very far away from his bed.

‘Lean on me,’ she ordered, rising with him.

‘I rather think I have already.’ As he stepped forward, the room closed in around him. ‘More than I should have.’

‘There’s no lock on the door.’ She guided him to the bathroom chair. ‘But I promise not to send the nurses in unless there’s a crash.’

When he finally emerged wrapped in towels twenty minutes later, the bed had been remade with clean sheets, and a cold meal of pate, French bread and salad lay waiting for him on a tray set out on the bedside table.

She saw him looking at it. ‘Don’t thank me, thank the nurse.’

‘Daisy? I may call you Daisy?’

‘You may. Though it does seem a little late in the day to ask. And unless you want to catch pneumonia, you’d better let me put that dressing gown on you.’

He handed it meekly to her.

‘Would you like to eat off the bedside table, or shall I lift the tray on to the bed?’

He looked at the food. ‘I never realised the hospital diet was so varied. And I’ll sit up to eat. That shower’s made me feel reasonably human again.’

He sat in the only armchair. She draped a blanket over his legs and manoeuvred the tray as close to him as she could. Then she poured out two coffees.

‘This is marvellous.’

‘I’ve never heard hospital food called marvellous before.’

‘I eat out a lot, and generally cheap. I’m not used to your standards.’

‘And what do you think my standards are?’

‘The Sherringham mansion.’



‘The Sherringham mansion is Richard’s house not Tim’s. I’m just one of the workers. With the simple uncomplicated working girl tastes my pocket dictates.’

He took a piece of bread and struggled to spread pate on it one-handed. ‘I’m a country boy, from Devon.’

‘I love Devon. Tim preferred Cornwall. But my first love was always Devon. My parents used to take me to Torquay every summer. After London it seemed like heaven.’

‘Then you’re from London.’

‘As much as I’m from anywhere. My parents split up when I was young then my mother died when I was twelve. I was more or less brought up by an aunt. My father remarried six years ago. He lives in Australia with my step-mother now, but I haven’t gone out of my way to keep in touch. Of course we invited him to our wedding, but –’ her voice trailed and her eyes clouded.

Trevor had pulled the file on Daisy’s brother Adam Walker. A footnote had detailed his death a year after he’d been sentenced, there’d been an inquest and the verdict had been suicide by hanging. Press clippings had been added by a bored or over-eager officer detailing the break up of Adam Walker’s parents’ marriage even before his case had come to court and his mother’s suicide a year after he’d been sentenced.

Tim Sherringham’s disappearance wasn’t Daisy’s first acquaintance with pain.

‘My mother lives with my brother and his wife on the family farm. Runs it too if I know her. Colin, he’s my younger brother, he wanted to stay. I couldn’t wait to get away.’

‘Do you go back?’

‘For an occasional holiday when I get leave. But the idea of going back is always better than the reality. You expect it to be unchanged from when you were a child. It

never is. I wish someone had told me when I was young, that I'd only be cosseted during my childhood. If they had, I might have made more of it.'

'Is that a hint?'

'Good God no,' he reddened.

'Did anyone ever tell you you're too sensitive?'

'Not recently.' He finished his coffee and poured orange juice into his glass.

'Where in Devon is your farm?'

'Near Axminster. You know Axminster?' She shook her head. 'There isn't much to know. It's a very small town. And the farm is even worse. Remote isn't the word. If you take the narrow road west out of town, and travel endless miles, you eventually come to a cart track. The cart track winds down and around, over hills and through woods until you think there's nothing left in the world but trees, then suddenly you hit this hidden wooden valley. Deep in the hidden wooden valley...'

'You find a haunted house?' she teased.

He looked across at her and was surprised to see her grey eyes shining in amusement. He was elated to think that he'd helped her lose sight of the greater traumas of her life, if only for moment.

'Might be, the Joseph ancestral home is Elizabethan.'

'Genuine Elizabethan?'

'Quite genuine and, what's more, lived in by Josephs and only Josephs since the house was built during the reign of the Virgin Queen. However, the men and women who lived out their lives within our beautiful, but now decrepit walls, were far too slow-witted and content to do anything dynamic, like return to this world as spectres.'

'How disappointing.'

'For you, not me. If I'd been brought up with ghosts around the house, it might have altered my way of thinking, and who knows, my entire life.'

‘Made you think more of the spiritual side than the material?’

‘Are you telling me I’m suitable for the police force and nothing else?’

‘Are you?’

He poured himself another coffee. ‘I hope there’s more to me than just the force.’

‘What about your life outside the force?’

‘When I was first posted here, I lived on the east side of town. My flat was not up to Grantley Mews standard, but it was better than where I live now.’

‘You moved down in the world?’

‘When I had my first flat I had the trimmings to go with it. A mortgage, a cat, new furniture, fitted kitchen, a girl – in short I lived the advertising man’s idea of a normal life. When the girl moved out,’ he tried, and failed to keep the bitterness from his voice, ‘it seemed pointless to keep the flat and the trappings.’ He thought of Mags. She’d been his girl, or had she? He’d thought so at the time. They’d lived together for six years. Longer than some marriages. He’d wanted to marry her but she wouldn’t make the commitment. And in the end he’d discovered why. Peter had told him. Peter knew – everyone knew, except him. She’d lived with him, let him pay the bills, climbed into bed with him every night just so she could carry on with the married man she loved.

With hindsight, it was all so obvious, and so convenient, from Mags’s point of view. What better sucker to leech from than one who worked shifts. He’d given her security and the flat as a base. The married man’s wife had been as blissfully unaware of the affair as he’d been. His girl – he couldn’t say Mags had been his girl, not knowing what he knew now.

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.’

‘I know all about you, so why shouldn’t you know what little there is to know about me?’ He finished his bread and took another piece, ‘I moved out, rented my upmarket flat to an upmarket copper and his wife. Then I met Frank. He’s an ex-copper. He was invalided out of the force after he was hurt in a fracas outside the stadium. He bought a shop in a run down area on the west side of town. He was having trouble with vandals, just kids on the loose. I volunteered to rent the flat above his shop to keep trouble at bay. Arrangement suited us both.’

‘You rented out your upmarket flat...’

‘Furnished,’ he interrupted his mouth full of bread and pate. ‘Which is more than can be said for my present place.’

‘You’re a funny chap.’

‘The move made sense at the time. Besides living over a shop has advantages.’

‘Such as?’

‘I don’t go hungry. Frank lets me forage at any time of the day or night. I keep a tally and pay him at the end of the month.’

‘I thought you said you ate out a lot.’

‘We have take-aways in the station sometimes. When we work late.’

She visualised the life he led, down to the last lonely detail. Impersonal, hectic working hours spent in the company of petty criminals, junkies and Peter Collins. And if she was faced with the choice of whiling away an hour or two with a junkie or Peter Collins, the junkie would come out on top every time.

After the bustle of the police station, the solitude of his flat. It was so different from her own life.

Was that why fate had struck at her and Tim? She’d been happy with him. Too happy perhaps. Had she tempted evil by taking their life together for granted? Had they

been singled out because she'd forgotten to be grateful for their very special blessings?

'Is this a personal or professional visit?' he asked.

'Bit of both.'

'I could smash you at noughts and crosses if you have a pen and paper,' he suggested, hoping she'd stay longer.

'If Tim and I hadn't been together, I would have taken you up on that offer of an evening out,' she felt the need to respond in some small way to his tact and kindness. 'Do you remember the night you asked me? In Casualty.'

'I remember, I didn't think you did.'

'Joseph?'

'I hear the light step, and dulcet tones of Sergeant Collins,' she said.

'In here,' Trevor said, resenting the intrusion.

'Good, the invalid's up. We haven't much time.'

'Much time for what?' Trevor asked irately.

'I have a wheelchair on order. Have to get you to the mortuary.'

The colour drained from Daisy's face and she fell back in her chair.

'You idiot,' Trevor snapped.

Peter sat on the bed. 'It's not Tim,' he said quickly. 'It's someone quite different.'

'Did they find anyone on the boat or the pier?'

'The pier was a wash out,' Peter complained, ignoring Daisy's pale face and tormented eyes. 'It took us two hours to cut our way through the barricades. Then when we finally stepped on to it, we found most of the flooring torn up. We couldn't go forward more than a couple of feet at a time, and it took us another hour to bring up the material we needed to bridge the gaps.'

'Did you reach the theatre?' Trevor asked impatiently.

‘Eventually. It’s in a hell of a state. The floor wouldn’t hold a sparrow in places let alone a man. If Andy sleeps there, he must hang from the rafters like a bat.’

‘So you found nothing.’

‘Nothing. The planks in front of the stage were missing, but there was no point in bridging that space. There were no curtains to speak of, so we could see all there was to be seen from the auditorium. Dust, broken windows, smashed chairs. That was about it. It’s being boarded back up now.’

‘And the boat?’ Daisy wound her fingers tensely in the folds of her long black skirt.

‘You didn’t exaggerate last night,’ he said grimly. ‘Forensic spent all morning in the cabin. I’ve never seen anything like it. They went over it with a toothcomb, filled more specimen bottles than I’ve seen in the last year.’

‘And?’ Trevor demanded impatiently.

‘You know it takes time for the reports to come back.’

‘By now they must have some idea what happened in there.’

‘Tim?’ Daisy pleaded.

‘None of the blood samples that were taken matched your husband’s group. I checked. But they did match Amanda Dart’s. We also found women’s shoes the same size as hers, with a foot inside one of them. And the pathologist’s fairly certain the hand’s hers.’

‘Were there any stains from any other blood group?’

‘None that I know anything about. Daisy, we’re going to have to go over your flat. There were five sets of prints in that cabin. We need to eliminate Amanda Dart’s, yours and Tim’s.’

‘Was there anything to prove that Tim had been there recently?’

‘Unless the forensic tests come up with something, no.’ Peter shook his head.

‘Then why do I have to go to the mortuary?’ Trevor asked.

‘Call came in late last night. A junkie OD’d on the street. He was found by a neighbour. There doesn’t seem much doubt about the identification, but I thought you ought to take a look, just in case. His name was Robin Dart.’

‘Where do you want it, sir?’

Patrick O’Kelly waved the blade he was holding in the direction of the freezers.

‘This one’s not likely to give you too much trouble, sir.’ The porter pushed the trolley into place.

‘Taken a medical degree in your spare time?’ Patrick asked, continuing his foray with the blade.

‘He’s a junkie. Has fresh needle marks in his arm.’

‘Thank you for the diagnosis, I wish the Coroner would accept it. Save pathologists a lot of work if porters were allowed to give their opinions as P.M. reports.’

Paul looked up as the porter swung the door shut behind him. ‘Shall I put it away?’

‘Let’s finish this first.’ Patrick cut through a section of tissue. ‘The serrations on this knife match the cuts on the neck and arm of the motorway corpse. This could be the actual weapon. Sergeant Collins, you’ve come to see the results of the tests on the knife?’ Patrick asked when Peter pushed Trevor’s wheelchair through the door.

‘You have a knife?’ Trevor asked.

‘Ben Gummer found it washed up under the pier this morning. It was in a leg of lamb. He would have thrown it away if it hadn’t been stuck through a black silk sleeve with a pom-pom attached to it.’

‘A clown’s sleeve?’ Trevor asked.

‘Could be. And the knife or one like it was used to carve up your motorway bodies. The serrations match. I

can't be more specific than that.' Patrick held the handle, blade uppermost between his gloved fingers. 'It's a common brand. You can buy one like it in any number of stores. Made in England, advertised as being able to cut through anything, including frozen meat. Sold as part of a set or singly.'

'Can we see the sleeve?' Peter asked.

Patrick's assistant passed Peter the plastic bag.

'Incidentally there was an inch or two of brown and greaseproof paper sandwiched between the knife and the meat, suggesting that it was well wrapped,' Patrick added.

Peter dropped the bag on Trevor's lap.

'I didn't see the face clearly, let alone the costume,' Trevor complained.

'But you did see it,' Peter said impatiently. 'Could this be his sleeve?'

'His, or any other Pierrot's.'

'Perhaps Daisy will remember more. She said she saw the clown full face in the torchlight.'

'Daisy Sherringham?' Patrick was still comparing the knife to sections of mutilated flesh.

'She and Sergeant Joseph were attacked last night by someone dressed as a clown,' Peter explained.

'Difficult,' Patrick commented. 'Like the knife, one sleeve is very like another.'

'Did your clown have two sleeves on his jacket?' Peter took the bag from Trevor.

'I think so; if his arms were bare I would have noticed.'

'Then there are either two clowns, or he lost his sleeve after he attacked you. You didn't tear his clothes?'

'No I didn't.' Trevor's shoulders were throbbing. He wanted to leave the blinding white, cold, dank atmosphere of the mortuary, and return to his hospital bed.



‘Supposing there are two clowns,’ Peter ventured.  
‘And the clown you saw...’

‘Beat me up. Terrified Daisy Sherringham, then lost his sleeve and his dinner in the sea?’

‘Put like that it does sound ridiculous,’ Peter returned the bag with the sleeve to Paul. ‘Is Robin Dart here yet?’

‘The OD’d junkie?’ Paul asked.

‘That’s the one.’

‘He’s just come in. You lot kept the body overnight in the police mortuary.’

‘Probably so the brother could identify him.’ Peter walked over to the trolley, and pulled back the covering sheet.

‘Glove and mask up if you want to unzip the bag,’ Patrick warned. ‘According to the porter it’s an open and shut case, but I’d still prefer to check it out.’

Peter helped himself to a mask and gloves from a stack on a trolley. He tugged delicately at the zipper and uncovered the face before wheeling Trevor to the trolley.

‘Is it Robin Dart?’ he asked.

Trevor looked down at the face. He’d sat with the man, drank coffee with him. Talked to him. ‘Yes.’

‘He could have picked a better time to kill himself.’

‘That’s if he did.’

‘Joseph, we’ve enough murder victims without looking for more. The man was a junkie. Junkies kill themselves all the time, accidentally – deliberately – it’s good of them to clean up the world for us.’

‘You’re a cynical bastard, Peter,’ Trevor retorted.

‘Maybe I can shed some light.’ Patrick exchanged his gloves for a new pair, joined them and fully opened the bag. He lifted Robin’s left arm and pulled back the loose fitting sleeve of the black sweater he wore. He placed his hands around the fleshy part of the upper arm and

squeezed. A spot of blood appeared in the crook of the elbow. He lowered the arm back on the trolley.

‘Fresh mark, and knowing what I do about the drug situation in this town, I’d say it was heroin but we’ll need to do a blood test to confirm it.’

‘Robin Dart didn’t do that,’ Trevor insisted.

‘It’s there, in front of you,’ Peter countered.

‘Robin Dart was clean.’

‘You’d just told him his sister was dead. That’s more than enough reason for him to regress.’

‘He was an actor.’

‘So?’ Peter snapped.

‘Actors have to wear all sorts of costumes. Some leave the arms bare. He went to Drama School. He had ambitions. He couldn’t risk being found out. He told me that he used the veins at the back of his knees.

‘How soon can we get a detailed PM?’ Peter asked Patrick.

‘I’ll make a start after lunch. Sorry it can’t be sooner, but one pair of hands and all that. The Home Office man is tied up with the specimens from the boat.’

Patrick folded Robin’s arms back in the bag. ‘Strange,’ he commented thoughtfully.

‘What?’ Trevor asked.

‘This.’ He indicated a mark on Robin’s forearm.

‘Vaccination test,’ Trevor said. ‘He showed it to me last night. He had it done as part of a medical for a job.’

‘That’s no vaccination test.’ Patrick fingered the mark. ‘It’s a tissue typing test carried out on donors and recipients to match them prior to organ transplants.’

## Chapter Seventeen

HARRIES' ELATION AT BEING picked out for undercover work faded the moment he set foot in the crumbling building that housed the day centre. It wasn't as if his fellow officers hadn't tried to warn him. He'd been regaled with the full complement of unsubtle jokes concerning filth, lice and putrid smells, but the banter hadn't meant much in the warmth and comparative comfort of the station. Then, he'd been too concerned with the manufacture of his cover story to listen to warnings. He'd even been I enough to cast himself in the light of an actor about to take the lead in a major production.

All heroic fantasies melted in the unwashed face of the human flotsam that bobbed in the pungent atmosphere of the cafeteria at the day centre. He tagged on to the motley queue waiting impatiently for the stewed tea and thick slices of bread and margarine on offer as lunch. He subdued his revulsion at the filth smeared over the rags of the hardened derelicts, listened to the disjointed conversations of the ones who still bothered to talk. Aggressive mumblings from the older tramps. Obscene ravings from a couple of female junkies who'd managed to finance their fixes for the day.

'I'll give you whatever you fancy for a fiver?'

He turned his head. The speaker had the flat-chested, spindly-legged, gawky look of a twelve-year-old. Except for the face. There was nothing under-developed or childish about the cold eyes or grim set of the mouth that reminded him of the ancient whores in the dockside pubs.

‘Push off.’ He only just managed to stop himself from adding “or I’ll run you in.”

The girl flounced off as much as anyone could in a micro denim skirt and laddered tights. ‘It’s you that’s missing out,’ she mocked.

He bought his tea and bread and butter from a harassed volunteer and looked around for somewhere to sit. He picked out a table in the centre of the room in the hope of overhearing something significant. He sat down and looked at the food. There were dark brown stains on his plate, and a greasy film floating on the surface of his tea. His brief didn’t include eating or drinking and he decided that he’d leave the table in a few minutes to study the notice-board pinned to the wall. He knew what to look for. Peter Collins had drummed it into him.

He stirred his tea with the lollipop stick that had been provided, and tore the bread into small pieces with his fingers. There weren’t any knives.

‘First time here?’

‘Yes.’ Just his luck, he was looking for Andy, or at the very least a villain and he’d ended up with a dog-collar.

‘Thought so, haven’t seen you around before.’

Harries remembered his cover. Hardened ex-military prisoner. Had to stick to it, with everyone. No matter how innocuous they looked.

The man offered his hand across the table. ‘David.’

‘Stephen – Stacko.’

‘Down on your luck?’

‘Isn’t that bloody obvious?’ He felt that Collins would be proud of him.

‘Would you like to talk about it?’

‘There’s nothing to talk about.’ Harries gave his rehearsed impression of a hard case. He stared belligerently at David. There was something odd about him, perverted even. Brown, greasy hair, beady eyes that

didn't blink. The eyes of a maniac? Harries knew he was being childish. He'd allowed the atmosphere to get to him.

'Have you anywhere to sleep tonight?'

'No.' Was the vicar trying to pick him up?

'I could give you some addresses.' Harries revised his harsh judgement. He was too cynical. After all, what would anyone get out of coming to a place like this and talking to down and outs?

'Social Services gave me the address of a place in Jubilee Street.'

'Ere, Father, over 'ere.' The girl who'd propositioned him earlier waved to the priest.

'I hope we can continue our chat later, Stacko,' the vicar smiled.

'Yeh.' Harries continued to play with his food. He carried morsels to his mouth whenever he thought anyone was watching, but he was careful not to swallow. Some things went beyond the line of duty. He waited twenty minutes. No one else came near him. He walked to the notice board. Bible tracts along the line of...

*Jesus forgave the sinner and blessed the prostitute.*

One that, cover notwithstanding, brought a smile to his face.

*The meek shall inherit the earth.*

There also cards carrying block printed announcements.

*St. Mary's church needs casual labour to clean up church yard. Small remuneration.*

Under the heading of

*Beds for the night.*

The address of the hostel in Jubilee Street, and the Salvation Army hostel in the next town.

*Run away from home? Phone this number. We won't tell anyone where you are, but we can put your relatives' minds at rest.*

*Hooked on drugs or solvents? If you are, we listen and help. We don't judge.*

He glanced around the hall surreptitiously. No one-legged men, no wild men with black hair. He hadn't needed a description for Andy. He was known to every copper on the beat. It had been optimistic of him to hope for a result the first day out. Collins had warned him he could be kicking around for weeks, but as he breathed in the stench of the place he didn't know how long he could stick it out.

'Looking for a job.' David, the vicar, was standing beside him.

'Yeh.'

'I know someone who is looking for strong young men. It's heavy work, but well paid. Abroad.'

Collins had mentioned something about someone recruiting down and outs. Could be a racket. He couldn't imagine what kind but if he didn't succeed in one thing, he might succeed in another. He'd tell Collins about it. Fifty-three, he had to report in the tobacconists on the corner of Balaclava Street.

'If you come with me now, I'll introduce you to the Recruiting Manager.'

'Now?'

David looked him up and down. 'Unless you've something better to do.'

'Nothing pressing.' Harries thrust his hands in his pockets and followed the clergyman out of the centre. If he didn't make it to the tobacconists on time it wouldn't matter. There was a bug in the heel of his left shoe that would enable the station to track him down any time they wanted. It was broad daylight. There were people around. And there was only him, and one middle-aged clergyman. Nothing he couldn't handle. One lucky break and he'd be

joining Collins in the Plain Clothes Squad. Off the beat for good.

After Peter and Trevor left for the mortuary Daisy sat in the empty room. She leaned back in the armchair and closed her eyes. The ward was peaceful, but not silent. The thousand and one small noises that make up the daily life of a hospital came softly to her ears. The squeak of the nurses' rubber soled shoes as they walked over vinyl floors. Buzzers clicking on and off. A daytime television quiz programme vying with a radio sports commentary. The strident voice of the WVS volunteer manning the library trolley.

Her body cried out for sleep, and for the first time in days she felt that she could. No spectres would rise to haunt her dreams in a crowded ward during the daytime, she was sure of it.

She'd been up most of the night, and the couple of hours she hadn't, she'd tossed fitfully on Judy's bed. Judy had taken the inflatable mattress herself, and had been sound asleep when she'd crept in after seeing Trevor to the ward.

Hearing a noise, she opened her eyes to see Alan backing out through the door.

'Sorry, didn't mean to wake you,' he apologised.

'I wasn't asleep.'

'You were certainly giving a good imitation of it. I'm on late lunch, so I thought I'd call up and see Trevor. Judy said you'd admitted him last night.'

'His charming partner has just wheeled him off to the mortuary to look at a body.'

'A body...'

'It belonged to a junkie. Apparently Trevor knew him.'

'Dr Daisy?' the sister knocked and walked past Alan. 'There's a call for you. It's Dr Richard Sherringham's house. You can take it in my office.'

'The man won't let up,' Alan said after the sister left.

'He needs to understand that I won't move in with him.' Daisy rose to her feet and Alan gave her a bear hug.

'I'll catch up with you later.'

'Thanks for being here, and helping,' Daisy said sincerely.

'I only wish I could be of some real help.'

'You are, more than you know.'

Five minutes after taking the telephone call, Daisy left the ward and walked purposefully towards the lifts. Pausing to allow a stretcher case to pass she glanced up at the clock on the wall. Three-fifteen. Coffee break time. She walked into the elevator, pressed the button for the second floor and waited for the doors to close. Why did this have to come now, on top of everything else?

She walked into the doctors' rest room. After acknowledging the sympathetic enquiries of her colleagues she edged past the group of junior doctors milling around the coffee machine and walked over to Mike Edmunds.

'How are you?' he asked.

'Fine,' she replied automatically, resenting his hushed tones more than the enquiry. 'Have you seen Judy?'

'I think she's in paediatrics with Alan. You know what the patient lists are like down there. Not much chance of taking a coffee break.'

'Thanks.' She turned to the door.

'Daisy,' he tapped her shoulder. 'There's nothing else wrong is there? If there's anything I can do...'

'No, and no,' she walked out not trusting herself to say another word.



‘What was that about?’ Eric Hedley asked Mike.

‘Daisy looking for Judy.’

‘Oh,’ he murmured uninterestedly. ‘Don’t you think so?’ he asked.

‘What?’ Mike asked irritably.

‘What we were talking about. There’s more future in private practice than the NHS?’

‘Definitely,’ Mike concurred. ‘From the NHS point of view there’s a brighter future if you go into private practice.’

Laughter erupted around them. Eric was furious, but he didn’t know how to retaliate. As the laughter died away people began to glance at the clock and leave the room. Jealousy, Eric decided angrily, joining the crush in the doorway. Mike was jealous of his success and wanted it for himself. Mike had only been offered a temporary post at the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic, while he – Eric, built marble towers in his imagination, basing them on the shaky foundations of the three afternoons he’d worked for Joanna Sherringham.

Daisy perched nervously on the edge of the chair in Alan’s office. When Judy finished with her patient she came in and Daisy motioned her to close the door.

‘Do you know where Richard is?’

‘No, why should I?’

‘Please, Judy, don’t lie. I know you’re having an affair with him.’

‘How did you find out?’

‘Does it matter?’

‘It does to me.’

Daisy folded her arms across her chest. She’d been dreading this moment for years. ‘Tim found out when we

were in our first year in college. He saw you and Richard walk arm in arm, into the hotel next to the tube station. It was only a couple of days after he'd introduced us to Richard when Richard visited the college as guest lecturer.'

Judy sat on Alan's desk. 'Why didn't either of you say something?'

'It was none of our business. You were both over the age of consent. You knew what you were doing.'

'And now we don't?' she challenged.

'Hare called me a few minutes ago. He's been trying to find Richard all day. Richard's not at the house, and he hasn't been to the clinic today.'

'Richard's coping with Tim's disappearance as best he can. He needs some time to himself,' Judy said defensively, thinking of the tranquilisers he was sleeping off.

'Joanna took the boat out last night by herself. She slipped and fell against the cabin door and cracked her collarbone. She's had it X-rayed and dressed at the clinic. She's resting at home, and although she insists she's fine, Hare thought Richard should be told. Please, don't make this any harder for me. Don't you see I had no choice but to talk to you? Aside from Hare and Joanna, I can't bear the thought of Richard missing. There's Tim...' Daisy left her chair and gazed out of the window.

'Richard's in an old coastguard's cottage, about a mile from Hunter's Cove. I can't telephone, because there isn't one. And presumably he's not answering his mobile.'

'He isn't and thank you,' Daisy murmured gratefully.

'The cottage is mine, Richard gave it to me.'

'Do you want to come with me?'

'You'll never find it by yourself. Alan and I should have the waiting room cleared by five-thirty. But there's one thing you should understand.' Judy recalled Richard's

assertion that he wanted to divorce Joanna and marry her, 'I'm not in a position to offer any long-term support to Richard. I have my work. My days are full.'

'If you love Richard, surely you'll want to be with him if he needs you. I don't know what the position is with Joanna – but...'

'I had – am having,' Judy corrected herself, 'an affair with Richard that his wife is unaware of. There's never been any question of anything more between us. I can't bear men that lean too hard,' she said vehemently.

'And women?' Daisy asked.

'You're different,' Judy said in a softer tone. 'You're the closest thing I have to a perfect friend.' Embarrassed because she'd allowed her feelings to show, she switched moods. 'Duty calls.' She jumped off the desk. 'Pick me up here at five-thirty and I'll drive to the cottage with you.'

'I'll telephone Hare and tell him I've found Richard and he is now with me. Hopefully he, and Joanna, will believe it.'

Daisy tried to put the sceptical tone in Hare's voice down to guilt on her part. Hanging up the phone she looked round Alan's office. He was having a late lunch. Poor him, there'd be nothing on offer in the canteen except stale rolls, dried up ham and warm lettuce. Then she remembered the look on his face when she'd told him about the body in the mortuary. Had Sergeant Collins lied? Could the body be Tim's and they wanted to keep it from her until he had been positively identified? She left the office and took the lift to the basement.

'Hello, Patrick, funny place to come for a late lunch, Alan,' Daisy said as she walked into the mortuary and saw both of them and Peter Collins leaning over a body stretched out on a slab.

‘Don’t you trust us to tell you the truth?’ Alan looked up from the mark on Robin Dart’s arm that he was examining at Patrick’s invitation.

‘I know you come here at least twice a day. But I just wanted a word with Patrick.’

‘It’s good to see you,’ Patrick said sincerely, ‘and I’m sorry to hear there’s still no news of Tim.’

‘Thank you. Sergeant Collins said something about a new corpse?’

‘I told you it wasn’t your husband,’ Peter said briefly.

Daisy shrugged her shoulders. ‘Thought I’d see for myself.’

‘As you’re here, you might be able to help us.’ Ever the opportunist, Peter picked up a bag from the slab behind him. ‘A clown’s sleeve and knife were washed up on the beach this morning. Can you remember any of the details from last night?’

‘Such as?’

‘Did the clown have two sleeves on his jacket?’

She thought for a moment. ‘Yes he did.’

‘You’re sure?’

‘Just as I’m sure the clown was taller than Trevor,’ she said thoughtfully. ‘When he lifted Trevor off his feet his head was above Trevor’s, but everything happened so quickly. All I can remember is a collection of impressions – the smudged make-up, the satin slippers, the white pom-poms – the wide bottoms of the black silk trousers.’

‘No knife?’ Peter pressed.

‘I don’t recall seeing one.’

‘Were the pom-poms like these?’ He handed her the bag.

‘Certainly similar.’ She returned the bag. ‘Where’s Trevor?’

‘I took one look at him when I came in and sent for a porter to take him back to his room,’ Alan answered.

‘You should never have brought him down here,’ Daisy reproached Peter.

‘Police business can’t wait. We *are* looking for your husband,’ he reminded her.

Daisy’s attitude annoyed him. He’d treated her gently since she’d patched up Trevor, and in return she’d snapped at him.

‘Daisy, can you spare a minute?’ Patrick asked. ‘We’d like a third opinion on this?’ he held up Robin’s arm.

She looked at the corpse. He was so young she struggled to hold back the tears pricking at the back of her eyes. ‘Skin test?’ She suggested, fighting to control her emotions.

‘Tissue typing?’ Patrick suggested.

‘Could be.’

‘Patrick said earlier that the test had to be done before transplant operations could take place. Are they carried out on both donor and recipient?’ Peter asked.

‘Obviously to get the best possible match,’ Daisy replied.

‘Kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, whatever the organ, the tissue typing test applies,’ Alan explained more fully. ‘People who want to donate one of their kidneys to a sick relative would have it done, or brain-dead or dying patients who’ve expressed a wish to donate their organs. Timing is crucial. The quicker an organ can be removed from a donor body into a recipient, the better the chance of success.’

‘Are you saying Robin Dart had this test so his organs could be transplanted into someone else?’ Peter asked.

‘Either that, or he was being considered as a possible case for a transplant,’ Patrick replied. ‘Do you know if he was suffering from any kind of organ failure?’

‘The only thing Trevor mentioned after interviewing him was his drug addiction, and Trevor insisted he’d kicked the habit. He did tell Trevor that he’d had some

tests done recently during a medical for a job. Could this test have been carried out for any other purpose?’

‘Such as?’ Patrick looked at the marks one last time.

‘To find out if he was an addict?’

‘Wrong test. Blood or urine would determine drugs used, type and quantity.’

‘The bodies that were brought in from the motorway,’ Peter asked. ‘Were there any organs missing from those?’

‘None. And I would have noticed. The heads and hands were gone, but then you already know that.’

‘Could any part of the heads or hands be used in transplant operations?’ Peter persisted.

‘The cornea of the eye,’ Daisy replied. ‘And possibly the hands and the face.’ She’d only just grasped the significance of Peter’s questions. ‘Nothing else in the head. Brain transplants, Sergeant Collins, are in the realms of fiction.’

‘I can’t understand why anyone would tissue-type a junkie.’ Patrick mused. ‘Drugs damage the usual organs used in transplants. Kidneys, liver...’

‘Robin Dart told Trevor he failed the medical examination. Could you find out if he was suffering from organ failure?’ Peter asked.

‘I could if everyone left me in peace for five minutes,’ Patrick said flatly.

‘One last question,’ Peter persisted. ‘What do you need to carry out a tissue typing test?’

‘Clean facilities and a small instrument to pick up a layer of skin.’ Patrick set down Robin’s arm, and signalled to Paul to take over. ‘The test itself can be carried out almost anywhere. The street if you want to. Pathology needs a reasonably equipped laboratory, but the organs used in transplants are a very dicey commodity. They have to be removed in sterile theatre conditions. Be treated carefully until they’re placed in the recipient in an

operating theatre. This is the only hospital for fifty miles capable of meeting those conditions. If anyone's carrying out illicit, undocumented transplants, it's not in this town.'

'But they could be done outside the town.' Peter considered the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic. Had Richard Sherringham built an operating theatre capable of meeting the criteria necessary to carry out transplants? Anything was possible given sufficient money. And Sherringham had money, connections and access to the rich who would be only too willing to pay, and pay handsomely, for an opportunity to extend their health – or their lives. There was a shortage of donor organs – the media were constantly appealing for more people to carry donor cards.

Where better to find that supply than among homeless drifters who wouldn't be missed. But where did that tie in with the bodies on the motorway, Tim Sherringham's disappearance and someone giving the brother of one of the victims a deadly fix? That's if he was given it and didn't do it himself.

Sam had said it was impossible to put a figure on the homeless. No one kept any records apart from the Social Services and they'd be happy to close down a claim, which could be very convenient if what he was thinking was even remotely close to the truth.

'Time I went to the station.' He turned to Daisy. 'Is it all right for Trevor to stay here until tomorrow?'

'Given the way you've treated him, I'd say it was essential.'

Peter left. Alan opened the door for Daisy then looked back at Patrick. 'You'll let us know...'

'The minute, heaven forbid, anything resembling Tim Sherringham comes in.'

The phone rang, slicing into their conversation.

‘Get that for me will you please, Paul?’ Patrick clipped the microphone and tape recorder he used to dictate his post mortem notes to his coat. ‘If it’s someone making a booking for a new client, tell them we’re having trouble accommodating the ones we have.’

Peter went to Bill Mulcahy’s office when he reached the station. His boss waved him into the only uncluttered chair.

‘How’s Trevor?’

‘Cut, bruised, nursing a broken arm and dislocated shoulder, but he’ll live.’

‘Is he in hospital?’

‘Yes. Daisy Sherringham arranged his admission. Between his arm and the battered state of the rest of him, he’s not fit for anything useful.’

‘Have you had the results on the junkie’s PM?’

‘I’ve just come from the mortuary. The pathologist was doing it as I left. He OD’d all right but we don’t yet know on what or if he administered the terminal fix himself.’

The telephone rang, Mulcahy picked it up and handed it to Peter. ‘Mortuary for you.’

‘Peter Collins.’ Peter listened for a few minutes then hung up. ‘That settles it. He OD’d but not from a fix. He was poisoned. The pathologist found enough cyanide in him to kill seven men.’

‘That sounds like the work of a drug gang. Check with records, see if they’ve anything on a Robin Dart working as a pusher or a carrier for anyone.’

‘Will do.’

‘Had some visitors earlier,’ Mulcahy swung his feet up on the desk. ‘Daisy and Richard Sherringham came in with Judy Osbourne. He admitted he had a ransom demand for his brother,’ Mulcahy crowed with a told-you-so grin on his face. ‘Telephone call, to his personal mobile a



couple of hours after he arrived back from the States, which is why we didn't pick it up.'

'How much did he pay?'

'By my standards, a bloody fortune. Four hundred grand in used notes, wrapped in brown paper. He jammed the parcel into the wire under the pier at three in the morning the day after he got back.'

'Then he walked away?'

'They told him they'd kill his brother if didn't, so he did just that.'

'Bloody idiot. Was there a second call?'

'That's why he's close to cracking. It never came.'

'What made him come to us now?'

'Daisy Sherringham wormed it out of him.'

'If Tim Sherringham's still alive I'm a monkey's uncle. All he's succeeded in doing is pouring money down the drain. The ransom gone?'

'Did you doubt it? I've put men inside and outside the Sherringham house. Arranged taps on the clinic's and Richard Sherringham's phones and put men into the clinic and the Sherringham apartment, but it's shutting the stable door after the proverbial. I've also arranged another search of the area around the pier for tomorrow, but I don't expect to find anything.'

'The bloody pier again. We went over every inch today, Bill. There was nothing. Bloody nothing. But I think we should search the Sherringham clinic as soon as possible.'

'Why?' Bill asked.

'Did you get my voicemail about Dart's skin test?'

'You want to search the Sherringham clinic because a dead junkie has a tissue type test mark on his arm?'

'A dead ex-junkie killed by an injection of cyanide.'

'There's no way anyone will issue a warrant for the Sherringham clinic on that. Upstairs has already checked

Sherringham out. They insist he's clean, and his clinic's clean,' Bill said firmly.

'And because they say they've checked out the place we have to back off.'

'I'll spell it out for you, Collins. The Holbourne and Sherringham clinic is crammed to the eaves with VIP's. Sick VIP's. The last thing they or we want is for them to get upset by us clumping through the place with our hobnailed boots.'

'In other words we've been nobbled by the brass,' Peter observed tartly.

'What upstairs thinks – and...' Bill struck a match, lit his pipe and puffed clouds of brown smoke into the room. ' – I agree with them, is that some envious bastard, or what's more likely bastards, wanted a slice of what Sherringham's got. They laid their hands on Tim Sherringham, got some information out of him that only the family knew, or at least enough information to convince Richard Sherringham they were holding him, along with Sherringham's mobile number and made a few calls.'

'Before or after they killed Tim Sherringham?' Peter asked.

'That's for us to find out.'

'And the bodies on the motorway?'

'Witnesses or accomplices they wanted to silence.'

'And the Dart girl? The clown that attacked Trevor last night?'

'Whoever attacked Trevor last night kidnapped Tim Sherringham. The Dart girl could have been part of it, or she saw something she shouldn't have. We know she went with Sherringham to Jubilee Street. We also know some of the characters who hang around down there. Anyone could have seen Sherringham give Sam that cheque. Known who he was, or whose brother he was. People with nothing,

have nothing to lose. Someone got greedy and dreamed up the kidnapping idea.'

'Someone from Jubilee Street?' Peter enquired sceptically.

'If Amanda went to Jubilee Street to look for her brother on the night she disappeared she would have had to pass the Marina. She knew Sherringham. The kidnappers could have been hiding him on his own boat. She saw him...'

'I don't buy it...'

'Will you let me finish one bloody sentence,' Bill lost his temper. 'It's late, I'm tired, and I need to think this theory through. We'll start again tomorrow morning. Seven sharp. I'll expect you at the pier.'

'And in the meantime we have a lunatic clown running loose on the Marina?'

'I've six men patrolling down there right now. Six men I've taken off other duties. If the citizens of this town knew just how thin the blue line was stretched tonight they wouldn't sleep. Which reminds me. Where's Harries? Dossing in Jubilee Street?'

'He failed to make his five-thirty contact.' Peter glanced at his watch. 'It's coming up to eleven, I told him to check in with Ben Gummer before midnight if he couldn't make the tobacconists. If he does turn up it means he hasn't a bed in the hostel.'

'Let me know if he's come up with anything.'

Peter reluctantly left his chair. It had been a long day. Too long.

'Collins? It's not the same is it?'

'What?' Peter snarled.

'Quarrelling without Trevor around to act as peacemaker.'

## Chapter Eighteen

PETER LEFT BILL'S OFFICE and walked down the corridor, halfway along he came to a small room scarcely bigger than a cupboard. A uniformed girl, slim, brown-haired and attractive in a youthful way, sat at a computer.

'Want to get yourself a cuppa, Constable?' Peter asked.

'That's kind of you, sir.' She smiled at Peter. When she'd been posted to the station, everyone had warned her that Sergeant Collins was a hard, unforgiving bastard, but he'd never been anything other than cool and business-like in his dealings with her. His attitude, coming after the lewd comments she'd received from some of the other men at the station, had been more than welcome.

'Run along, I'll mind the shop.'

'Shall I bring one back for you, sir?' she asked shyly.

'Yes. Thanks.'

After she left he sat in her chair and began to punch buttons. A thin line map of the town appeared on the screen. He carried on punching. With a tardiness that irritated, dots appeared like a neon rash. They covered three areas of the town. He checked, then double checked both the computer and his notebook. When he was certain he'd left no margin for error, he pressed the print button. Pocketing the printout he closed down and secured the programme he'd been working on.

'Black, two sugars, sir?' The girl reappeared.

'Just the ticket, Constable Merchant.' He swivelled the chair and took the coffee from her. 'Do you trust me?'

If the question had come from anyone other than Sergeant Collins she would have taken it as a prelude to suggestions of after-shift drinks. But there was no hint of seduction in Peter Collins's cold, calculating eyes.

'I mean professionally,' he added, as if he'd read her thoughts.

'Yes, sir,' she stammered in embarrassment.

'I'd rather you didn't show anyone the trace programme. I've put a security coding on it. The back up banks as well,' he informed her, in case she doubted his ability. 'There's no easily accessible record left of the trace on Harries, or of any checks you made on his progress, in short, according to the open programmes on this computer, Harries never went under cover.'

'Sir...'

'You'll have to take my word that it's important.' He drank his coffee, considered what had happened to Tim Sherringham, took his notebook from his pocket and scribbled a note. Folding it he pressed it in her hand. 'The password, in case I'm hit by a bus. Promise me you won't action it unless I've gone missing for more than twenty-four hours.'

'And if someone asks to see the programme?' she protested.

'Do some selective forgetting for your sake – and Harries'.'

There was an undercurrent in Peter's voice that sent fear trickling down her spine. 'It's that important, sir?'

'That important.'

She'd never heard anyone in the station denigrate either Sergeant Collins or Joseph's professionalism. And it wasn't just because of Collins's reputation as a hard man. As Stephen Harries had once told her, 'Mulcahy, Collins and Joseph are on the level.' She only had to look back as far as her previous posting to remember bent coppers and

what they could do to a force. Rumours had abounded, most concerning the Drug Squad.

Complicity, blackmail, officers working hand in glove with pushers, taking cuts, on the make – but she'd never picked up a whisper of it here. And this case wasn't even Drug Squad. It was linked to the motorway murder enquiry, although she'd never figured out how Stephen Harries going undercover into Jubilee Street fitted in.

'I realise I could be asking you to stake your career on this, Merchant. But I am straight.'

'I'll do it, sir.'

'Good,' he pulled himself out of the chair.

'Stephen – Constable Harries,' there was a tremor in her voice. 'He is all right isn't he, sir?'

Peter smiled. He should have seen it. Both young, keen, ambitious, eager to please.

'He's fine, Constable Merchant. I'm going out to pick him up now.'

'Thank you, sir.' She blushed crimson.

'You'll see him tomorrow,' he assured her as he closed the door.

Bill Mulcahy scanned the computer printout Peter had handed him.

'There's no possibility of mistake in the location?'

'None.' Peter paced to the window. 'What do you say to a warrant now?'

'It'll take time.'

'We haven't any.' He left the window and returned to Mulcahy's desk. Flattening the printout, he sketched out the main landmarks with his forefinger. 'The sea, the headland, the town centre. The girl was thorough with her checks. She placed Harries every quarter of an hour. The markers are clocked. The first cluster from eleven-forty-

five to one is in the day centre. Then he moved to Balaclava Street.'

Bill hit the paper. 'Within the outline of the Grand Hotel. What hotel did Trevor say that junkie had his medical in?'

'The Grand. Harries was there until four-forty-five,' Peter continued. 'At five he was on the road that leads out to the headland, and the final cluster which finishes at six o'clock are inside the perimeter fence of the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic.'

'Why would he go there?' Bill asked.

'Go, or was taken?' Peter rubbed his eyes. 'There's the transplant theory. Richard Sherringham treats rich VIP's. If they should need a transplant and there's no organ available through the usual channels, who better to look to for supply than a healthy down and out who wouldn't be missed?'

'How about transmitter failure,' Bill suggested.

'Harries didn't keep the arranged rendezvous. That means he was either on to something, or he couldn't meet me because something or someone stopped him. And the last place he was at was here.' Peter slammed his finger down on the outline of an outbuilding close to the clinic.

'You're sure monitoring continued.'

'I double checked that before I security coded the programme. The monitoring continued routinely every fifteen minutes until eleven o'clock.'

'Then either the transmitter failed or he moved out of the clinic,' Bill commented.

'That transmitter has a fifty mile radius. Would you mind telling me how Harries could have moved fifty miles in fifteen minutes?'

'Then it has to be transmitter failure.'

'We've never had one pack up on us before.'

‘First time for everything. Have you tried the obvious, like phoning the hostel in Jubilee Street?’

‘There and the White Hart. He hasn’t been seen in either. I sent him undercover to investigate a disappearance. Now he’s disappeared.’

‘I sent him.’

‘I briefed him.’

‘I’m the Super, you’re the Sergeant.’

‘I’m going to go in and get him.’

‘I’ll get a warrant first thing in the morning.’

‘That could be too late!’

‘Go and see Trevor now,’ Bill ordered. ‘Check if the hotel the junkie had his medical in was the Grand.’

‘I know it was.’

‘Check, if Joseph’s sure we’ll visit Sherringham tonight. Find out exactly what’s in this building, and ask his permission to search it.’

‘If he refuses?’

‘He’d better not.’ Bill looked up from the map. ‘Phone me from the hospital.’

‘I’m on my way.’

Daisy laid her suitcase on the bed Judy had made up for her. She snapped open the locks, and lifted out the pair of slacks that lay on top. Taking a hanger from the wardrobe, she folded them over the bar and hung them away. She tried to ignore the bleak ugliness of the room. The cheap furniture universal to all hospital flats. She’d never noticed, or resented, the décor, or rather lack of it, in the staff quarters when she’d visited Judy. But now – now – she clutched the blouse she’d taken out of the case, creasing it.

If only she could be sure she was doing the right thing in moving into staff quarters. She was trying to cope with her grief by emulating Judy’s independence. But what



worked for Judy might not work for her. Judy had always been self-contained and self-sufficient. She never had. She'd allowed Tim to see just how much she'd needed him from the outset of their relationship. She'd known, even then, that she needed love and other people. Judy could take people and relationships or leave them. But she needed Tim – Tim...

What if he returned to their apartment and found it empty. He wouldn't know where to look for her. But he was dead – she believed it, didn't she? She kept telling everyone he was dead. Better dead than the unknown...

Still clutching the blouse, she left the bedroom and walked into the living room. The television screen stared blankly back at her. She switched on the set. A heap of bodies, limbs contorted into unnatural positions flashed on to the screen. An unnervingly quiet voice recounted a grim catalogue of horrors being perpetuated in the name of freedom somewhere in Latin America. She switched off the set. Silence was preferable.

She fought her instinct to run along the corridor to Judy's flat. An hour. She'd barely been alone for an hour. Footsteps resounded outside her door. Panic dried her throat. Were the walls that thin? She'd never heard footsteps when she'd been in Judy's flat. She dropped the blouse. The steps moved inexorably closer.

She stood still, nerves taut, senses strained until even the blood rushing in her veins became a thundering roar. The doorbell pealed. She didn't move. No one except Judy knew where she was and Judy would have called out her name, not rung the bell.

'Daisy,' a knocking – a man's voice she recognised.

'Richard?' she walked unsteadily to the door and opened it.

He was wearing a dark grey suit, clean white shirt and black and grey tie. Outwardly, at least, the authoritative Richard she was used to.

‘Come in.’ She opened the door wide, and he entered. He looked around and she saw he missed nothing. The discoloured tiles above the sink, the corners of the furniture where the veneer was cracking and splitting, the stains on the carpet...

‘I couldn’t stand living alone in the apartment,’ she explained. ‘But I need to work. I thought moving in here would be a compromise for a while.’

‘And when Tim comes back?’

‘We have to face up to it, Richard,’ she said bitterly. ‘He might not.’

‘He’ll be back. I’ve paid the ransom. They have no reason to kill him.’

She wanted to remind Richard that Tim could recognise “them” and that gave them more reason to kill than release him. But she sensed Richard’s desperation and knew he needed to cling to the hope of Tim’s return. And she envied that hope, too much to destroy it.

‘I want you to come home with me. If you won’t think of yourself, think of Joanna. She needs you. She’s hurt...’

‘She’s not any worse, is she?’

‘No, but we should be together. Tim wouldn’t want you to stay in this place by yourself. He’d want you to be with us. When he comes back he’ll need all the support we can give him.’

‘I...’

‘It’s what Tim would want you to do.’ He opened his arms and she clung to him – out of loneliness – out of fear. As a child Tim had adored Richard. As a man he’d modelled himself on his older brother more than he realised. Even in small ways, like using the same brand of

aftershave. And when she closed her eyes Richard's voice was so like Tim's...

'I'll help you pack. You can drive home with me now. Daisy, Tim's coming back. I can feel it. He's somewhere close – he'll be back.'

'You really believe that?'

'I really believe that. Why torture yourself by living alone here, Daisy? We need your support as much as you need ours.'

'You need me?' she echoed.

'You're family, Daisy. Of course we need you.'

She picked up the blouse from the floor. 'I haven't unpacked much. I'll get my suitcase and leave a note for Judy.'

'You're sure Robin Dart said the Grand?'

'How many times do I have to tell you,' Trevor snapped irritably at Peter. 'If you told me something that made sense, perhaps I could help.'

'If I knew what made sense I wouldn't be here,' Peter stretched out his legs and kicked the foot of the bed.

'That bloody hurt.'

Peter picked up Trevor's temperature chart and flicked absently through it. 'Harries has disappeared.'

'From Jubilee Street?' Trevor frowned.

'It doesn't look like he got that far.' Peter removed the computer printout from his pocket and handed it to Trevor. 'I sent Harries out with a brief to hang round the day centre, sleep in Jubilee Street and report back if he saw Andy. I told him it would be better still if he managed to talk Andy into giving him a guided tour of the Pier, providing that part of our information isn't sheer fiction. He had a transmitter in his shoe. It's just as well. He didn't keep the rendezvous I'd arranged for this afternoon.'

‘He went from the day centre to Balaclava Street,’ Trevor looked up. ‘The Grand?’

‘Then the headland road and the Holbourne and Sherringham clinic. Or to be more precise this building inside the grounds.’

‘And you remembered the mark on Robin Dart’s arm, and came up with the idea that Harries’ disappearance has something to do with using live bodies for transplants?’

‘The idea’s monstrous. But consider the evidence. Robin Dart had a tissue typing mark after the same medical as another drifter who’s since disappeared.’

‘He could have simply gone home. And where does Tim Sherringham fit into your theory? He wasn’t a drifter. He never lived in Jubilee Street.’

‘He went to Jubilee Street with Amanda to look for Robin Dart. He poked around. Asked questions. Probably upset people. Doesn’t it begin to make sense?’ Peter asked impatiently. ‘If he suspected a connection between the clinic and the disappearance of Robin Dart, he wouldn’t have broadcast it. Even if he found positive, definitive proof, his brother, his own brother for Christ’s sake, runs the clinic.’

‘You’re building a skyscraper on the basis of one small mark on a junkie’s arm?’

‘Amanda Dart – Robin Dart – Tim Sherringham – all dead, or,’ Peter picked up the map from Trevor’s bed, ‘missing.’

‘And now Harries,’ Trevor murmured. ‘You’re not thinking of going into the clinic to look for him?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’ll never get a warrant.’

‘Bill’s going to try tomorrow morning. But I briefed Harries and sent him in. It’s my responsibility to get him out.’

‘You do realise that if your suspicions are correct, and I’m not saying they are, Harries could already be dead?’

‘The trace was still operational at six this evening.’

‘That doesn’t mean Harries was alive.’

‘No, but his shoe was somewhere in that clinic at six. And I intend to find it.’

‘You don’t know your way round the place.’

‘Daisy Sherringham might.’

‘You can’t ask her.’

‘Why not? She’s involved. Her old man’s disappearance started all this.’

‘Peter...’

‘Don’t worry I won’t do anything until tomorrow morning.’

‘The hell you won’t. I know you.’

A plump, officious nurse bustled into the room. ‘Visitors at this time of night,’ she clucked disapprovingly. ‘Mr Joseph needs rest.’ She picked up Trevor’s wrist and took his pulse.

‘I’ll leave you in capable hands,’ Peter mocked from the door.

‘You won’t make a move until tomorrow?’

‘No more talking, Mr Joseph,’ the nurse ordered.

‘Sergeant Joseph,’ Trevor mumbled as she pushed a thermometer into his mouth.

‘Scout’s honour,’ Peter held up two fingers behind the nurse’s back.

‘You were never a scout,’ Trevor countered. The thermometer fell on to the bed.

‘Sergeant Joseph!’ The nurse shook it, and pushed it back under Trevor’s tongue.

‘If I were you I’d give him a sleeping pill,’ Peter whispered to the nurse as he backed out of the door.

Peter left the hospital and walked the short distance to the block that housed the staff quarters. He showed his ID to the doorman and asked for Dr Osbourne's flat. The doorman pointed to the lift.

'Fifth floor,' he mumbled before returning to his Playboy.

The lights were dimmed when Peter stepped out of the lift. He walked up the corridor scanning the nameplates. Judy Osbourne's was the last door he looked at. He stood for a moment and listened. All was silent. He looked at his watch – twelve-thirty, hardly the time to be making a social call.

He rang the bell. It echoed disconcertingly loudly back at him. He waited. A muffled voice called from behind the door, demanding to know who he was.

'Sergeant Collins. Is Dr Sherringham with you?' The door opened a crack, and a tousled blonde head peered at him.

'No. And before you ask, I'm not telling you where she is, unless you've found Tim.'

'I'm sorry; I've no news about Tim Sherringham.'

'Good night. Unlike policemen the rest of humanity, myself included, need sleep.'

'Please, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't important.'

'How important is important?'

'Life and death sounds melodramatic.'

She opened the door a little wider, and looked at him. 'You're serious, aren't you?'

'Please. I need a few minutes.'

She shut the door, released the chain, and opened it. 'I never thought I'd hear you say that.'

'What?' he stepped inside and closed the door.

'Please', she tied the belt on her dressing gown tighter and pulled up the collar.

‘I need to speak to Daisy urgently. About the Sherringham clinic.’

‘Can’t you wait for Richard to give you one of his guided tours?’

‘He gives tours?’

‘To anyone interested enough to ask for one.’

‘You’ve been?’

‘Along with the entire staff of the General. He’s always trying to recruit people – good people that is, from the NHS.’

He pulled the printout out of his pocket. ‘If this is the clinic, what’s this building here?’ he pointed to the outline of the building Harries had last been marked in. Judy squinted sideways at the paper.

‘An annexe?’

‘Brilliant, I didn’t think of that,’ he said sardonically.

‘I think it used to be the staff quarters of the old clinic. When Richard built the new clinic he used the old Victorian clinic to house the staff.’

‘Then no one uses this for anything.’

‘When I was there a delivery van pulled up outside. Possibly it’s used for storage, or...’

‘Or?’ he interrupted eagerly.

‘Joanna might use part of the building to house her research.’

‘I didn’t know Joanna Sherringham does research.’

‘Has done for years. Into cosmetics. Skin reaction – that sort of thing. Very lucrative apparently.’

‘Thank you.’

‘What have I done?’

‘A great deal,’ he opened the door, ‘sorry to have disturbed you so late.’

‘Sorry *and* please in one night. Sergeant Collins, you’re becoming almost human.’

Peter didn't try to contact Bill. All he could think of was the tiny clock on the computer printout. Its hands stuck at six o'clock. The digital clock in his car read midnight. Six hours since the transmitter in Harries' shoe had sent out its last signal. Anything could have happened during those six hours. If he phoned Bill it would take another half hour for them to meet up before driving to the Sherringham mansion, and Sherringham could come up with some excuse or other that might prevent them from searching the clinic until Bill got a warrant. He wasn't prepared to risk further delay.

He slammed the car into low gear and overtook a van as it left the entrance to the hospital. The headland road would be clear at this time of night. Ten minutes and he'd be outside the clinic.

The security guard was obdurate. 'I haven't had any calls from the clinic.'

'You wouldn't have,' Peter flicked his foot impatiently on the accelerator, revving the engine. 'I told you, the call came from outside. Someone driving on the headland road saw a prowler inside your fence.'

The security guard removed his cap and scratched his head.

'Are there any dog patrols in the grounds?'

'There's only me, sir,' the guard was awed by Peter's ID card. 'And I shouldn't rightly leave the gate.'

'No, you shouldn't. I'll check out the grounds for you.'

'Would you like me to call the clinic, sir? There might be someone there who could help you?' the guard fingered his truncheon nervously. Peter had seen the type before. Nineteen – twenty, wearing the muscles it had taken



months if not years of workouts to achieve. The boy had the physique of Mr Universe and brains that wouldn't get him through the police entrance examination. There were lads just like him in security guard uniform everywhere.

'It was one prowler. Not an army. Lift the barrier so I can get this car off the road, and I'll take a look around.'

'Yes, sir.' The guard leapt into his cabin and pressed the switch. 'Call me if you need any help, Sergeant,' he shouted as Peter drove through the gates.

Peter drove along the drive until he was out of sight of the guard, then switched off the car headlights. Driving on sidelights he continued slowly along the road that led to the old staff quarters. He drove round a bend in the drive and he saw it. A gothic building with decorative turrets and pointed slate tiled roofs that shone silver in the moonlight. He parked the car in the shadows at the side of the building, pulled the hood of his anorak over his head, took a small torch from the glove compartment, raided the boot and walked to the front door.

He checked his pockets as he walked. The bunch of skeleton keys that went with him everywhere, much to Bill's annoyance, hacksaw blade, wire cutters – nothing that could be used as a weapon. He'd have to be more careful than Trevor had been on Daisy's boat.

The front door was a steel sheet, bolted, barred and padlocked. Because the building housed drugs and medical stores, or for a more sinister reason? He walked around the back. There, he found a pair of metal doors sunk at ground level. An old coal chute. He pulled out his torch, shielding its beam with his hands he studied the chain and padlock twisted round the door handles.

He took out the hacksaw blade. Twenty minutes later he heaved open the doors and slid cautiously down into darkness. His imagination went into overdrive. Would he find bodies? Racks of boxed organs laid out on shelves in a

walk in freezer, prizes awaiting suitably emeritus recipients?

He shone his torch around the cellar when he reached the bottom of the shute. Dust, cobwebs, broken wooden chairs, steel bed frames, rusted with age and damp. He relaxed. Then he remembered Harries.

He found a staircase. The heavy metal door at the top was locked. He stepped back and rammed into it with the full weight of his shoulder. It shook from the impact but failed to give. He shone his torch around the edge. Close fitting, steel-lined, no keyhole. He suspected there'd be bolts on the other side.

He walked back down the stairs and shone his torch into the damp darkness. Rooms led into one another, rotting door frames, that no longer held doors, marked the boundaries of what he guessed had once been servants' quarters. Then he found a room, larger than the rest. In the centre of the longest wall was a fireplace. An enormous Victorian effort that could have held a range large enough to roast an ox and have room to spare. He walked over to it and shone his torch up the chimney.

A rusted meat hook hung down close to his head. He tested it with his weight. It held, he hauled himself up. Ten minutes later he wished he hadn't. The chimney, wide at first, narrowed. He continued to climb using his elbows and his feet until he became stuck. He struggled to gain a grip on the brickwork. His feet slid free, while his arms remained jammed, the torch clamped in his cramped hand a few inches from his face. He remembered something from his caving days. Something his instructor had said, about muscles swelling to pack a space. The only thing to do was remain still and wait for his muscles to contract.

He thought of Harries. The idiot was probably safe at home right now bedding Sarah Merchant. He wouldn't be the first undercover cop to crawl back to his real life when

night fell. He couldn't even blame him. A day spent among the smells and lice of the day centre dragged like an eternity. To a newcomer, alone, undercover for the first time, it would seem even worse. How many times had he and Trevor sneaked off from a verminous day in Jubilee Street, to a cheap hotel that could provide hot and cold running water and room service?

And if Harries was safe and sound, and he was caught stuck in the chimney of a building in the grounds of a reputable clinic – that's if anyone found him before he died of dehydration – what excuse could he possibly give? He would deserve everything Richard Sherringham could throw at him. Trevor was right. One mark on a dead junkie's arm had driven him insane.

Daisy paced the floor of her bedroom, hoping to walk until she was too tired to put one foot in front of the other. She was trying to drive herself into a sleep too deep for nightmares, too deep for headless bodies to creep into her subconscious, too deep for thoughts of Tim to rise up and tear at her raw emotions until they bled.

A cry disturbed her. Joanna? Or Richard? Joanna was in pain, she had a right to cry out, but all of them were on edge. Richard with his sense of expectancy had heightened her sense of foreboding. Perhaps Tim would be found soon, as Richard had said, but not in the way he wanted.

She put her hands over her ears in an attempt to shut out the sound. She needed to think, to concentrate. She had tried to talk to Joanna when she had returned to the house with Richard; she had even offered to stay with her sister-in-law. But Joanna had retreated into her customary reserve, shutting everyone, even Richard, out. Richard had lied when he had told her they needed her. No one needed her. Not any more.

She resumed her pacing, switching on the radio as she passed the bedside table. Soft music filled the air. Tchaikovsky. How Tim had loved Tchaikovsky. He'd played it in the apartment, loud enough for him to hear it in the shower. Once the retired major in the apartment below had banged on the ceiling...

'Daisy?' Richard tapped on the door.

'Come in.'

'I heard you walking. Can't you sleep either?'

'No.'

'I've just given Joanna something to make her sleep. I could do the same for you.'

'And tomorrow when I can't sleep. You'll increase the dose?' She switched off the radio.

'There's nothing wrong with using a temporary crutch to see you through a bad time.' He looked out over the moonlit garden. 'I'm not sure if the pain actually lessens in time or simply becomes more bearable because you get used to it. You lower the dosage gradually, then one night you suddenly find that you don't need help any more.'

'Was that what it was like for you when your father died?' she asked intuitively.

'Yes.'

'And Tim?'

'Tim was a child at the time. He didn't understand death. Its bloody awful finality.'

'But he loved your father.'

'Yes, he loved him. We both did.' Richard turned to face her. 'Do you want to sleep?'

It would be easy to resign all responsibility to him. Even the responsibility for her own body. 'Yes. Thank you Richard.'

## Chapter Nineteen

AFTER WHAT SEEMED LIKE hours of struggle, Peter managed to free his right arm. He thrust it above his head with the intention of slipping back down the chimney, when his hand closed over the edge of an inner wall. Hoping it was the top of the back wall of the fireplace on the floor above, he felt around carefully with his fingertips. He was right. The chimney widened above him. One more push and he'd be above the fireplace on the next floor. He kicked out his feet and pushed with all the strength he could muster. He inched upwards, gripping the lip of the wall with both hands.

After a hard and painful struggle he stood upright, his feet resting where his hands had been, in the larger, communal chimney. There was room to move. He took off his anorak and flung it down between the inner wall and where he guessed the fireplace to be. It landed with a soft thud. He was right. He had climbed up one and a half, if not two floors. He lowered himself downwards. It was a tight squeeze. Instead of encountering the empty space he'd expected, his foot hit something solid.

He lashed out in frustration. There was a splintering and tearing and he rolled forwards through a board partition into unrelieved blackness.

Cursing the pain in his knees and elbows, he felt for his torch. A faint glimmer led him to where it had fallen, beam downwards. He picked it up and shone it over himself. Great clumps of filthy soot hung from his clothes, his shirt was ripped and splashed with blood. He'd scraped the skin from his hands and arms, and, by the feel of it, his

knees. His trousers had fared no better than his shirt. Freezing cold, he slipped his anorak back on and shone the torch around the room.

Racks of medical records towered around him. Shelves held file after file. Dust lay thick on them and the floor. The room looked as though it hadn't been opened in years. He looked for a door that would lead into the rest of the house. He found a door, it was locked. But it was a wooden door, not steel. He felt for his skeleton keys. A couple of minutes later he was in an outside corridor. He closed the door behind him and began his search.

He opened lock after lock, inspected rooms filled with clean and presumably current medical records, rooms filled with stacking chairs, candles and oil lamps. He opened door after door, only to be met with the same disappointing utility items. Disposable cardboard bedpans, incontinence pads, paper sheets – and when he'd checked every room on the ground floor he tried the second.

Unlike the rooms on the ground floor, they were unlocked and empty. Dust, cobwebs, torn linoleum, rolls of rotting carpet. No laboratories. No organs waiting for transplant operations. No corpses. He walked back downstairs, and sat on the bottom stair. He'd broken the law, skinned his knees and arms, stuck himself in a chimney, ruined his clothes and all for bloody nothing.

He looked for a door that led down to the cellar. If he could open it from this side he would, and to hell with being discovered. Anything had to be better than climbing back into that chimney.

He saw a set of double doors. A heavy black and red sign warned:

NO UNAUTHORISED ENTRY. DANGER  
RADIOACTIVE MATTER

and below it in thick red letters:

DISPOSAL POINT FOR RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Peter visualised the computer screen, cluster of neon dots centred in a sketched outline of the clinic. He'd sent Harries out. He had to find him.

He attacked the lock with his skeleton keys. He succeeded in turning the ratchet after five minutes of sweating, concentrated effort. It opened into a small hall. A row of grey aprons, gloves suspended above them hung on a rack opposite. Another sign:

**APRONS AND GLOVES TO BE WORN AT ALL TIMES WHEN HANDLING WASTE MATERIAL**

He tied an apron around his waist and pushed a pair of heavy gloves over his bleeding hands. There was a door to his right, and one to his left. He opened the one on the right and shone his torch on a light switch. Remembering the steel plates that guarded the doors and windows he risked turning it on.

Bright red plastic bags, bulging with what looked like paper, marked:

**DANGER CONTAMINATED MEDICAL WASTE**  
were ranged along a wall. Clean white tiles lined the floor and walls. A door set in the far wall was steel lined and he guessed it opened to the outside. He went back into the passage, and tried the door on his left.

It was locked, and it took him a long time to open it. Eventually he turned the handle and flicked on the light switch. The same blank white tiled walls glared back at him. He stepped into the room and turned. A row of half a dozen cylindrical containers were ranged along the same wall as the door. All were marked with skull and crossbones, and:

**RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL**

He took a closer look. The containers were lidded but not sealed. He hesitated. If he opened one it might put more than his career at risk – but the nagging demon that had tormented him since Harries had disappeared off the

computer screen made the decision for him. He knelt down and lifted the lid from the first lead-lined drum.

Half an hour later Peter found it increasingly difficult to ignore the blood splattered over the grey apron and the rust-coloured stains that slicked like dried oil over his lead-lined rubber gloves. He felt as though he'd been crouched in the cramped small ante-room, surrounded by bins, blood-soaked rags and jagged lumps of flesh forever.

Around him lay segments of skin, tissue and splintered, bloodied bones. He found it difficult to equate the mess he was delving into with a living, breathing body. There were so many small pieces. Perhaps it was just as the labels suggested. Medical waste – by-products of the operating theatre. The results of amputations and corrective surgery.

At the bottom of the last lead-lined barrel he found a pair of shoes. Stained, scuffed, broken, black shoes, one had a sock inside it. Its shabby heel held a secret he knew only too well. He twisted the sole and the transmitter he'd planted only hours before fell out. It lay surrounded by shreds of flesh and pools of congealing blood. His first concrete piece of evidence. And it had cost Harries his life.

He looked around for something he could recognise. He saw an eye, a section of scalp with hair the same colour as Harries...

He cradled the shoe, wiping it free from the gore that was smeared over it, then realised he had to clean the mess up. If he didn't, whoever had put Harries' remains in the bin would know someone had been here. They wouldn't get a warrant until morning. Time which could be used by whoever was responsible for this to clear away the evidence. He had to re-fill the bins. Clean the floor, re-lock all the doors, get out the way he came in – with the shoe.



He took off his anorak and wrapped it around the shoe. Trying not to think about Harries, or what he was doing, he scooped the butcher's mess back into the bins. When he finished the floor was like a battlefield. There was nothing in the room he could use to clean up the blood. He walked out into the hallway. There was nothing there either, and when he looked down he saw that he'd left a trail of bloody footprints. He took off his shoes and socks, and barefoot, began a systematic search of the storerooms. Eventually he found a sponge and a bucket of cleaning fluid under an old sink in a cloakroom.

He carried them back to where he'd left his shoes. He cleaned them first, then he began to mop the bloodied floor vigorously attacking the shreds of flesh and bloodstains that would prove the bins had been tampered with. When he'd finished, he wiped the bins and hid his apron, gloves, and the bucket and sponge he'd used in the last bin before closing the lid.

He'd get himself screened for radiation contamination at the General. The signs were probably a blind, but it was as well to be careful. He picked up the bundle he'd made of his anorak and began to lock all the doors.

Peter slowed his car at the gate. The guard walked around to the side and Peter opened his window.

'I was just about to telephone the clinic, sir. You were gone so long I thought you might need help.'

'The report warranted a thorough search.' Peter switched off his car headlights, and shrank down in his seat lest the guard's suspicions be aroused by the dirt and blood splattered over him. 'I found everything in order, and I have other calls to make.'

The guard jumped back and raised the barrier. He was too alert for Peter's liking. If he should spot the stains...

'Goodnight, sir.'

Peter stamped his foot on the accelerator and drove out, on to the road. He had his evidence. All he had to do was to get it to the station. Bill couldn't possibly refuse a second thorough – and legal, search in the morning.

Silence lay thick and heavy over the second floor of the Sherringham Mansion. Daisy lay deep in a dreamless, drugged sleep, oblivious to pain, oblivious to feeling. The curtains hung limp and sluggish at the window, the air was warm and still on the gallery outside the bedrooms. Downstairs, the grandfather clock ticked dully on in the hall, marking off seconds that held little meaning in the quiet house.

Richard lay awake in his darkened bedroom. Around him the stillness seemed eerie and oppressive. No matter how he struggled to concentrate on other things, his thoughts kept returning to Tim. What was he doing at this moment? Was he trying to sleep, bound hand and foot somewhere in locked isolation? Or was he stowed away close to a television or radio where he could hear the appeals for information as to his whereabouts?

A board creaked in the room next to his; instantly on the alert he eased open the top drawer of his side table and reached for the gun he kept there. The connecting door between his and Joanna's room swung open, and she stood before him, a silhouette in the shadows. She walked towards his bed and a shaft of moonlight fell on her through the open window. Her white silk negligee and cropped blonde hair gleamed silver, giving her an oddly chaste appearance. Almost like that of a choir boy.

'I'm awake.' He thrust the gun back into the drawer. She hadn't set foot in his bedroom for over six years. Not since her miscarriage. But that didn't excuse his neurotic behaviour.

'I'm sorry,' she stood beside the bed.

‘For what?’

‘Waking you.’

‘You didn’t. I can’t sleep either.’ He switched on the bedside light. She was trembling, her entire body racked by spasms. He left the bed and led her back to the warm spot he’d vacated. She lay down, covered her face with her hands and curled into a tight ball – effectively shutting him out yet again.

‘Try to sleep,’ he folded the duvet around her, hitched up his pyjama trousers and reached for his dressing gown. ‘I’ll go into the dressing room.’

‘Please don’t leave me,’ she begged. He sat next to her on the bed. She drew close to him. ‘Please, Richard, stay with me. Just for tonight. I know you don’t want me. But please, just for tonight.’

He lifted the bedspread from the empty half of the bed, covered her, then swung his legs up and stretched out beside her. She was right. He didn’t want her. Perhaps he never had. Only the package that had come with her. The opportunity to buy into the clinic, the position in English society, the luxurious home she made for them both. But then, she’d never wanted him for himself either. She’d married him because he was Theo’s son. Possibly they deserved one another. It was just so bloody hard to live with a woman without any kind of mutual understanding, or, what was even worse, the desire or the energy to create one.

What had happened to his dreams? Had his father’s death or his own compromises led him to this state of unfeeling cynicism? Twenty – even ten years ago he’d believed himself capable of so much. Now without Tim there didn’t seem to be any point in carrying on.

It was dark when Richard woke. He was confused by the body that lay alongside his own. He looked for the outlines of the furniture in the cottage – then he

remembered – it wasn't Judy beside him. He was in his bedroom with his wife. The irony of the situation wasn't lost on him.

Her grip across his chest tightened, and he realised she was awake.

'Stop fighting it, Joanna. You need to rest. If you relax the drugs will take over and you'll sleep.'

Her tears trickled over his chest. Joanna, self-contained, unemotional Joanna was going to pieces. Even after her miscarriage she'd remained stoical, the epitome of the stiff-upper-lipped Englishwoman. It had to be more than just the cracked collar bone. Perhaps it was delayed reaction to Tim's disappearance.

'It's all right to cry.' He resorted to the standard medical response to tears. Her hold on him intensified, then he felt her lips, trembling and moist, brush across his neck. His initial reaction was indifference, then when a familiar warmth stole through his veins, he thought, "why not?"

She was another being, someone to cling to in the dark. He returned her kiss, and tasted her salt tears, the sharp edge of grief added spice to their lovemaking. Love and compassion didn't come into it. They were two lonely, miserable people who needed someone to cling to during the dark lonely hours.

Mulcahy stared at the shoe on his desk. 'Who would think of looking, much less willingly search, for human remains in a barrel marked "radioactive". You're a fool, Collins. But I hand it to you, you're a clever fool.'

'Harries...'

Mulcahy couldn't stand Collins's guilt on top of his own. 'Harries was a copper. He knew the odds.'

'He was a kid.'

‘He was old enough to join the force. If you beat yourself over the head with this you’ll be carried out of here in a straitjacket.’

‘I want in on the search.’

‘You’re going to the hospital. I’ll get one of the duty officers to drive you.’

‘Later.’

‘I’ll not take the responsibility. If you are contaminated, the whole bloody station will have to be scrubbed and everyone in it.’

‘I could be clear.’

‘Of radiation contamination, possibly, but God alone knows what else you could have picked up when you delved into those bins.’

‘It could take hours to screen me.’

‘Even if you’re clean, it’s twenty-four hours stand down and rest and that’s an order. It’s not up for discussion.’

Peter knew when he was beaten. ‘You’ll let me know?’

‘I’ll keep in touch. Now go. If you could see yourself from where I’m standing, you wouldn’t wait a minute longer.’

‘No evidence of exposure to radiation. But the duty doctor, who doesn’t know you as I do, believes you to be in shock.’ Judy clipped the small torch she’d been shining into Peter’s eyes into the pocket of her white coat. ‘Are you capable of being shocked?’

‘We’re all capable of being shocked, Dr Osbourne. Even inhuman police officers. I take it I can go.’ Peter buttoned his shirt.

‘You *are* in shock.’

‘I’ve been shocked before. I’ll survive.’

‘Clinical shock, Sergeant, is not quite the same as your ordinary common or garden shock. You should rest for a couple of hours. Somewhere warm and comfortable. Like the spare bed in Sergeant Joseph’s room.’

‘I have my own bed thank you.’

‘Then go to it.’

Peter stood up to fasten his trousers. He pulled his belt and staggered.

‘I wouldn’t grab hold of a trolley. These floors are slippery and you could find yourself sharing Sergeant Joseph’s room with something more than mild shock.’

He sank back down on the chair.

‘You really are in a state. I could quote your pulse rate – the...’

‘Spare me the medical details. I don’t need a doctor to tell me I feel lousy.’

‘Same old Sergeant Collins. Polite and charming at all times. Well what is it to be? Do I call your colleague in and ask him to escort you home?’

‘As I’m here I may as well see Trevor.’

‘I’ll order a wheelchair.’

‘You’re enjoying this aren’t you?’ he challenged.

‘Not at all. If you try to walk out of that door you won’t get half way down the corridor. Here,’ she took a paper cup from a roll lying next to the sink and filled it with water. ‘Sip slowly, and breathe deeply. Not at the same time.’

He watched her warily over the rim of the cup.

‘Is now a good time to ask you if you’re any closer to finding Tim Sherringham?’

‘Now’s as good a time as any to tell you that we’re following leads.’

‘I suppose it’s just as pointless to ask you why you wanted to be checked out for radiation contamination.’

‘I poked my nose into a bin that had a warning sign plastered on its side.’

‘That was stupid of you. May I ask what kind of bin?’

Peter studied her reaction as he answered her question. ‘A round white barrel marked Radioactive Waste, just like the ones they use for medical waste.’

‘Have you any idea what goes into those barrels?’

‘I have now. What happens to them?’

‘Sealed in concrete, dumped in an area set aside for radioactive waste.’

‘Which is?’

‘Out at sea, buried in the heart of the English countryside. I only know what I read in the papers.’

‘The perfect place to dispose of a murder victim,’ Peter watched her eyes. ‘And if no one misses the victim you have the perfect crime.’

‘You think Tim...’

‘I didn’t mention his name. How many of those barrels does an average hospital get through in a week?’

‘I have no idea.’

‘How would a doctor kill someone?’ Peter asked bluntly.

‘Doctors are in the business of saving lives, Sergeant Collins, not taking them.’

‘But supposing a doctor wanted to dispose of someone humanely,’ Peter persevered. ‘How would they do it?’

‘In any one of a dozen ways.’ Judy was beginning to find the conversation bizarre – and unpleasant.

‘Would such a death be painful?’ Now he’d begun, Peter couldn’t leave the subject alone.

‘Not necessarily.’

‘Suppose the victim knew what was coming?’

‘If you’re talking about mental anguish, you know as much as I do. Why do I get the feeling you know a great

deal more about Tim's disappearance than you're telling anyone? Daisy's suffering all the torments of hell not knowing what's happened to him and you're sitting there grinning like a Cheshire cat. You don't give a damn...'

'That's where you're wrong, Dr Osbourne. I do give a damn. Very much so.'

She turned her back on him, walked over to the sink and washed her hands. He could have kicked himself. He'd said more than he'd intended to, but he couldn't stop agonising over Harries.

He pictured Harries locked in a room, waiting for death. Harries helpless, strapped to a trolley, his mouth gagged, his eyes wide in terror as someone closed in on him with a syringe.

'How would you kill someone humanely if you absolutely had to?' he demanded. Death was a spectre every police officer had to live with. But not torture, not experimental procedures that put the same value on human life as it did on laboratory rats.

'If you halt the flow of oxygen to the brain, even for a comparatively short time, you cause brain death. And that process is generally painless.'

"Generally painless." The horror evoked by the matter-of-fact explanation outraged Peter. What about the blind panic felt by a man fighting for his life? The gruesome stew of human remains he'd delved into?

'A couple of fingers pressed on the right spot on the neck would induce unconsciousness in seconds, brain death in minutes. Or an anaesthetic could be administered. Couple the patient to carbon monoxide instead of oxygen for a short time and you kill them.'

'Painlessly?'

'Painlessly,' she echoed. 'Are you going to tell me why you want to know?'

'Later, when I'm sure of my facts.'



‘I have other patients to attend to. I’ll send a porter with a wheelchair.’

‘I can walk to Trevor’s room.’

‘Against regulations,’ she said firmly. ‘The last thing the NHS needs is a lawsuit for negligence from someone who’s too arrogant and bloody-minded to take medical advice.’

Trevor moved awkwardly around his hospital room, gathering the few belongings Peter had brought in for him. Flinging them on to the bed next to his case he began to pack. He checked his watch for the tenth time in as many minutes. Twelve-thirty. Peter had told him to be ready at twelve, but then Peter hadn’t looked too well himself when he’d called in at six that morning. He’d wait another half hour then he’d call a taxi.

‘Good morning, or is it afternoon?’

Daisy was standing in the open doorway of his room. Deathly white, her hand shaking as she offered him a steaming mug. ‘I made coffee in the ward kitchen. Would you like some?’

‘Yes, please.’

‘I didn’t bring any milk or sugar,’ she apologised.

‘I often drink it neat in the station.’

She slumped into the armchair. The expression in her eyes froze the smile on his lips. ‘Are you feeling all right?’

‘I’m the doctor, you’re the patient.’

‘Not any more.’ He held up his discharge papers.

‘Going home?’

‘As soon as Peter gets here.’

‘Judy said something about Sergeant Collins coming in early this morning.’

‘He found some barrels that might have contained radioactive material,’ Trevor said casually, not wanting to

discuss what Peter had discovered. 'He thought it best to get checked out. Just being cautious.'

She picked up her coffee cup and toyed with it.

'Did you take anything to make you sleep last night?' he asked.

'I thought you were on sick leave, Sergeant?'

'I don't deserve that,' he said quietly. 'I'm concerned about you.'

'You sound like an officer who works on the drug squad.'

'I meant to sound like someone who cares.' He flushed crimson under her steady gaze. 'I'd like to help.'

'You can help by finding Tim. I need to bury him,' she lashed out.

He turned away from her and resumed his one-armed packing of his suitcase.

'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.'

'No apologies necessary.'

'I don't know what I'm doing, what I'm saying.' Tears flooded her eyes and she directed her anger at Richard. She'd coped until now without resorting to drugs.

Trevor abandoned his packing and walked over to her. He sat on the edge of the bed next to her chair. 'I really would like to help.'

'I don't even know how to help myself.'

'What I'm trying to say, and not very well, is if you need anything, anything at all, I'm at the end of a telephone. And thanks to this,' he indicated his bandaged arm supported in a sling, 'I have all the time in the world to spare.'

'I miss Tim. I love him, I'll always love him,' she murmured, more to herself than him.

'Feelings can't be switched on and off, and even if they could, I don't think you'd want to.'

‘I don’t think I’ll ever be capable of feeling anything for anyone other than Tim again. It’s like being dead myself.’

‘The last few days have been hell for you.’

‘Don’t you understand? I don’t care about anyone,’ her voice rose precariously. ‘Richard – Joanna – Judy – Alan, they could all die...’

‘You’re numb. You’re shocked. It’s a natural reaction. I know. I’ve seen it time and again.’ He took her hand. She was ice cold. ‘A police officer’s job can be a lousy one. I’ve seen people react this way to grief before. I’m not going to tell you it will get better in time. I’m not sure it does. But I do know that people go on. Resilient beings, people.’

‘Richard said much the same thing.’ She moved away from him back into the chair. ‘You’re a special person. That girl of yours must have been an idiot to leave you.’

He turned aside, walked to the window and looked out. ‘It’s not easy being with a police officer.’

‘Don’t underrate yourself. You’ve a great deal to give.’

‘To the force, perhaps.’ His eyes, dark with passion, looked into hers. He wanted to tell her he loved her, but it was neither the time, nor the place. But he clung to the hope that there would be a time for them. When all this was over, and forgotten, by all but a few people.

Images flowed through Daisy’s mind at breakneck speed. Tim as she’d last seen him pulling his shirt over his head in their bedroom. Robin Dart lying on a slab in the mortuary. Richard sitting in the gloom of the cottage’s badly lit living room. The look on the Inspector’s face in the police station when Richard had told him about the kidnap demand.

‘Sorry I’m late.’ Peter burst through the door.

'I haven't finished packing.' Trevor left the window and went to the bed. He snapped his suitcase shut. He felt in his pockets and found an envelope, a circular that had come through his door. He hadn't even opened it. 'My address.' He thrust it at Daisy. 'The telephone number's in the book. Should you want to call in or phone any time...' Conscious of Peter behind him he left the rest of the sentence unsaid.

'Thank you. Should you find out anything...'

'I'll ring you personally. I promise.'

'See you around, Dr Sherringham.' Peter took Trevor's case.

'Yes.' She turned her back on them and continued to look out, through the window. She shouldn't have come into the hospital. She was too tired, too miserable to work. She should have stayed at Richard's.

Barely aware of them leaving the room, she continued to think of Tim. She was behaving as if she wanted him dead. Who loved Tim the most? Richard who hoped with every fibre of his being that Tim was alive, or her, already planning his funeral before they'd even found his body?

## Chapter Twenty

TREVOR FOLLOWED PETER INTO the lift. Peter hit the button and the doors closed.

‘Lost a girlfriend and found a wife?’

‘Lay off, Peter.’

‘That was Dr Daisy Sherringham, the light of your life, in your bedroom at...’ Peter glanced at his watch, ‘one-forty-five in the afternoon.’

‘My hospital room, and she’s desperate for news of her husband. As I’m a police officer she assumed – wrongly – that you’d keep me informed.’

‘Then ask where I’ve been, and what I’ve been doing?’

‘If you’ve any sense after last night – bed.’

‘Unlike you I didn’t have company.’

‘You bastard. If we were anywhere else I’d...’

‘In your one-armed state. Never.’

Trevor turned his back on Peter in disgust. He didn’t speak again until they reached the car. ‘If you were standing in the middle of a rose bed, Collins, you’d see only manure.’

‘From where I’m standing right now, I can’t see any roses, and that’s for sure,’ Peter said grimly.

‘That’s because you’re not looking.’

Peter slung Trevor’s case in the back of the car. ‘All right if we stop off at Ben Gummer’s place on the way to yours?’

‘Why?’ Trevor demanded suspiciously.

‘Bill won’t let me near the clinic. So I thought I’d do a little investigating of my own. I’d like to ask Ben if he remembers any more about finding that knife.’

‘The man took his dogs for a walk on the beach. The dogs found a parcel of food washed up on the shore and they started playing with it. He rescued it and found a knife that may, or may not, be the murder weapon. What more is there to know than that?’

‘The dogs found it trapped in the barbed wire under the pier together with the sleeve of a Pierrot costume. And that pier and the Pierrot costumes bother me. I went down there this morning at first light, rotten boards apart, there’s no way anyone can walk on to that pier from the promenade. The search squad replaced those barbed wire barricades if anything, even better than they were before.’

‘Then the food parcel didn’t fall from the pier. The dogs could have dragged it from God knows where. It could have fallen from a boat.’

‘I don’t see how, unless the boat was the seaward side of the pier. I checked the currents and tides for the past few days with the Harbour Master this morning. That’s why I was late. There’s no way that parcel could have been carried to where it was found, if it was dropped by the Marina’s sea traffic.’

‘Then it could have fallen from a boat that was close to the pier,’ Trevor argued, pain making him irritable.

‘Exactly. A boat manned by a Pierrot. Possibly even the same one that had a go at you. And although the pier’s barricaded on the seaward side, it doesn’t look anything like as formidable as the other three sides.’

‘How do you know?’

‘I checked from the headland.’

‘You drove out to the headland?’

‘This morning, when I left the hospital.’

‘When did you sleep?’ Trevor demanded.

‘I didn’t.’

‘The parcel could have been carried to the beach and dumped close to where Ben found it?’

‘By?’

‘Sailors – down and outs...’

‘Sailors carry their food to the docks or the Marina. That’s where their boats are. And if it had been found by down and outs they would have left less than Ben’s dogs.’

‘OK. Say it did fall from the pier.’ Trevor conceded. ‘You searched the place; tell me, why would anyone go there?’

‘Nostalgia? Hidden treasure? How would I know? Either way we didn’t search any further than the theatre.’

‘You said you’d seen everything you wanted.’

‘Perhaps I missed something.’

‘My God. You’re admitting that you might have botched a search. I never thought I’d see the day.’

‘I made a list of things I want to check with Ben.’ Ignoring Trevor’s jibe, Peter drew his notebook from his top pocket and tossed it into Trevor’s lap. ‘The theatre layout. The position of the parcel when he first saw it. And, I want to ask if he remembers seeing a boat yesterday when he found the parcel. If he did, there might have been a marker painted on the side. Name of a yacht, wharf number, anything that might lead us somewhere.’

‘If Ben saw something more he would have told us about it.’

‘I can’t sit back and forget what I saw last night.’ Peter’s face darkened.

‘Bill’s on it.’

‘The more people who look, the more chance we have of catching the bastard behind this.’

‘Face it, neither of us are up to much.’

‘What do you want me to do?’ The brakes of the car screeched when Peter took a corner at speed. ‘Forget

Harries? Amanda Dart? Your junkie? Who incidentally died of a poisoned dose, and no sign of a struggle, no bruises. Just a smile on his face. We're dealing with clever, rotten people. And you expect me to let them carry on scheming, murdering, doing whatever they want.'

'I'm sick, remember.'

'Only in the head.'

'I'll go with you to Ben Gummer's. But no more, Peter. Not until I'm fit again. I'm sorry about Harries. I liked him. I'm sorry about Amanda and Robin Dart. And, God knows I'm sorry for Daisy Sherringham. But I'm sick, sick and tired. I need the leave I've got coming.'

'To chase Daisy Sherringham?'

For once Trevor didn't rise to the bait. 'In time, who knows. That's if she'll let me near her. For the first time in years, I've something on the horizon that's worth living for. And I'm not risking that. Not for you. Not for your crazy notions of revenge. And certainly not for an investigation that's going nowhere. I'm taking this leave. Understand?'

'I understand all right. I just wonder how you'd feel if it had been Daisy Sherringham instead of Harries in that barrel last night.'

Peter's mobile rang. Trevor waited until the sixth ring.

'Someone wants you.'

'They can wait.' Peter turned to the deaf old crone who was washing down the tables in the bar in the White Hart. 'If you don't go upstairs and wake Ben I'll...'

'He's locked in and won't come out until he's good and ready. And that won't be until the bar opens.'

Peter's mobile stopped ringing. Seconds later it trilled again. Trevor walked over to the window that overlooked the beach. He was finding it increasingly difficult to hide his amusement. Bruisers, bouncers, pushers, junkies on the



rampage – Peter could cope with them all. But give him one obstinate old woman, and he was as helpless as a baby. This was a story he'd enjoy repeating in the station.

'Sod it.' Peter went to the door and finally answered his mobile. Trevor took the opportunity to speak to the old woman himself.

'Like I said,' she shouted in Peter's direction. 'The guvner won't come down until just before opening.'

Peter switched off his phone. 'Bill wants me in the station. He won't tell me anything over the phone. I'll drop you off on the way.'

'Ben should be down in half an hour or so. I'll stick around and wait. I can always take a taxi home.'

'Are you sure?'

'I've nothing better to do. And a drink would go down nicely.'

'If it's nothing vital, I'll be back.' Peter hesitated.

'Sooner you go, sooner you'll be back.'

'See you.'

After Peter left, Trevor almost pulled himself a pint of beer. Then he remembered the cloudy dregs he'd been given the last time he'd been in the bar and prised the top off a bottle of lager. He counted out the correct money, and left the coins together with the bottle cap on top of the till. Nodding to the old woman he sprung the bolts on the back door and stepped into the beer garden.

The gaunt iron skeleton of the pier brooded grim and forbidding in the glittering sunlight. The beautiful spring weather did nothing to soften the outline of its rotting hulk. Rather it seemed to blacken its shadowy depths, reminding him of past, hot, noisy, sunlit days. The unpleasant truth was that he too would in time become nothing more than a blurred image, on age-stained, crumbling photographs and

a sunken grave in the family plot in an over-grown church yard.

He shuddered, wiped the top of the bottle and drank, his memory flicking from the distant past to last summer. He and Peter had worked the beach. In August it had been a pusher's dream and a copper's nightmare. But even as he'd stretched out on the hard, baking sand dressed only in his swimsuit, he'd noticed that the solid carpet of sun worshippers thinned long before it reached the pier. Perhaps the decaying structure hid more ghosts than even he knew about.

He finished his lager. The alcohol made him feel pleasantly light-headed. Daisy's dark smudged eyes no longer gazed reproachfully into his, as they had done earlier. Instead he remembered their conversation. She'd talked to him, really talked to him, not of mundane everyday things, but her private thoughts.

Daisy was all he'd ever imagined a woman could be. It had to be a plus that he could talk to her. Proof that there could be something between them. Not now, but possibly in the future.

A movement beneath the pier caught his eye. A shambling figure was swinging down inside the wired off structure, like a monkey in a cage. He ran down the path to the beach, tossing his empty lager bottle behind him. It fell on the lawn. Earth gave way to soft sand. Each step needed the effort he normally expended on ten. The twisted wires of the barricade drew nearer, and still the figure swung precariously downward.

His arm hurt. His chest heaved for air, his lungs strained to bursting point, his head swam dizzily. The barbed and knotted wires loomed closer. He didn't pause to think what he was going to do once he reached them. The figure stopped. Saw him. Then beat a retreat.

Trevor ran on, directing his steps to the point where the figure had turned, below the high-tide line. He waded knee-deep into the water as the agile figure swung upwards, and disappeared through the boards on to the pier.

The barricade – there had to be an overlap in the curls of barbed wire that allowed a man to slip inside. He splashed up and down, following the lines of bent and contorted wires, searching for a break in their tangled continuity. He found it. But not until he was almost waist deep in freezing water. The corner. The break was almost at the corner. Two parallel barricades, not one, overlapped for twelve yards or more. Impossible to spot unless you knew they were there. He inched his way forward, tearing his anorak on the piercing barbs. The gap was narrow. Then he saw a ladder leading upwards.

Cursing his broken arm he began to climb. Hooking his legs around the rungs to get a firmer grip. Sliding his good hand up the side. Too afraid to relax his hold for an instant. His shoes and trousers were slippery from sea water. Rust powdered his hands. It gave him something to grasp hold of, and the metal beneath it was surprisingly strong. He looked up. Solid wood. Not rotting. Solid. There had to be a trapdoor. He'd worry about that when he reached the top.

He looked down and saw a larger gap than the one he'd waded through. A gap in the centre of the seaward side. A gap high and wide enough to sail a small boat through. He swayed sickeningly. Mustn't look down. He hated heights. The water swirling dizzily below made him nauseous. He closed his eyes to everything except the rung in front of him and the rung above. Up – up – up.

He remembered the Pierrot. The strength in the clown's grip. The sound of his arm breaking. Of being

tossed aside on the deck of the *Freedom* – the mutilated bodies in the mortuary...

Don't look down. He closed his eyes and clung to the ladder for a moment. When he opened them again he stared at the rung at eye level and didn't look down. A dull clunk echoed beneath him. He felt the ladder vibrate. Something large hit the metal legs of the pier. A throat-drying, mind-numbing fear paralysed him. He heard the sound again and tried to put it from his mind. Music – he'd think of music – of Daisy.

*She walks in beauty like the night* – that wasn't a song. That was poetry. He hadn't read that poem since school.

Climb on. Slowly, one step at a time. One leg at a time. Think of Daisy – the Pierrot. Had the Pierrot come this way?

His head hit the top. A trapdoor? It moved. He felt it move. Ignoring the pressure on his head he pushed with the crown of his skull. He dared not release his one handed grip on the ladder. The trapdoor was giving way. Opening. He climbed on slowly – painstakingly. The ladder ended. He crawled on hands and knees into the darkened room above and crouched there, sweating, exhausted from the effort of climbing – and fear.

After a few moments he looked around. A skylight. A small square of blue that did little to illuminate the room. Shapes in the gloom. A bench. A generator. Not old, but new, covered in oil that gleamed dully. A stack of cans. Petrol cans for the generator? An ice chest. Rusted. Plastered with ragged stickers advertising ice-cream. Square cornets, wafers, plain orange lollies. None of today's chocolate and raspberry sauce covered delicacies.

He rose shakily, tested the boards tentatively with his weight. The floor held. He couldn't see any pin points of light, the first tell-tale signs of rot. Plain wooden walls. No

stage. No auditorium. No theatre with the dust-covered death-trap floor Peter had described. Yet he could have sworn he'd entered the pier at the back – unless there was a room beyond the theatre, and this was it. A room Peter had missed.

He looked for a door that led out on to the pier itself. He walked from the seaward wall, to the wall that adjoined the rest of the pier. A small dark tunnel, no more than four feet high, opened in front of him. He crouched down, crept forward – only to find his way barred by solid planking. He ran his hand over it, starting at the top, working down. His forefinger slid into a hole. A key hole? He thumped his fist hard against the wood. A scurrying noise scabbled from the other side. Rats? Or a single human rat? The one he'd followed?

Tired of straining his eyes looking into unrelieved blackness he crawled back, squatted beside the pile of cans, opened one and sniffed the contents. He'd been right. Petrol. He felt the side of the generator. It was warm, it had been running, and not that long ago. He turned to the ice chest, and threw back the lid. Cold air wafted out. He peered inside and saw only darkness. He reached inside the chest with his good hand. His fingers met something soft, stranded. He knotted his fingers tightly round the strands...

Peter Collins was driving through the town centre when the call came in over the police radio. The numbered code for life and death emergency followed by a plea for assistance. Location – the pier, – he should never have left Trevor. It wasn't even as if the man was fit for duty.

Ignoring a symphony of blasting horns, accompanied by motorists' curses, he negotiated a U-turn in the middle of the High Street. He pressed his foot down on the accelerator and sped back along the road he'd just travelled.

Ben Gummer slung the shot gun he'd loaded over his shoulder and whistled for his dogs. 'Don't let anyone in except the police, Mary,' he ordered.

'I wouldn't go out there if I were you. You don't know if that man's dead.'

'I'm only going to take a look round. Remember to lock the door behind me.'

'I was going to,' she bit back.

Ben stepped into the beer garden. The body Mary had seen fall from the pier was floating in the water behind the wire. He narrowed his eyes, trying to get a clearer focus. Old age didn't come by itself as the saying went. He used to be able to see a pigeon half a mile off, and more to the point hit it. Now he couldn't even see a bloody handkerchief when he held it under his nose.

The dark mass in the water separated into two indistinct blurs, then merged again. Were there two men in the water, one pulling the other? They moved away from him towards the impenetrable barricade, then, miraculously emerged from the deep water at the far end of the pier into the open sea.

He shoved a cigarette between his lips. Mary had yanked him out of a beautiful X-rated dream with a crazy tale about policemen. One of them going to the pier. Then a body falling.

'What's happening Ben?'

He turned and saw Peter Collins running towards him.

'You got here bloody quick.'

'I'd only just left. Where's Trevor?'

'If that isn't him down there, I don't know. Mary said a policeman climbed on to the pier and a few minutes later

she saw a body fall from there. She was right about one thing, there is something down there. See it?’

‘I see it.’ Peter ran headlong down the path Trevor had taken such a short time before.

‘Hey, wait for me. I’ve a gun.’ Ben called his dogs and followed as fast as his wheezing, creaking body would allow.

‘I brung him out for you, Mister. He’s hurt. You can see it’s bad. I had to drop him down through the hole, but he landed in the water. Didn’t hurt himself no more. I swear it. I had to do it, Mister. Honest. The clown was up there. He would have got me as well if he could have. So I brung him down.’ Andy pulled the body he’d towed through the wire barrier towards Peter. Peter stretched out his arms to take the burden. Kneeling in the shallows he lifted Trevor’s shoulders on to his lap.

He brushed the shock of dark hair away from the pale face, stared into the half open eyes, ran his fingers over the parted lips. ‘Trevor you can make it. The ambulance will be here soon.’ The terrifying lack of response turned his pleading to cursing. ‘For fuck’s sake, Trevor, say something...’

‘It’s his head, Mister.’ Andy stood, arms flapping, a ragged scarecrow pegged to a pool of white-crested waves.

Peter ran his hand over Trevor’s cheek, as his fingers travelled upwards they slid into a bloodied dent, above Trevor’s left ear. He withdrew his hand, and stared at his fingers. For the first time he saw the pink foam on the sea around him.

Sliding his arms beneath Trevor, he rose from his knees, lifted Trevor clear of the water and carried him to the beach. Even with the added weight of the water that saturated his clothes, Trevor was a lightweight. The fool never would eat enough.

Kicking his dogs back with a sharp word of command, Ben came to help him.

'I can manage,' Peter muttered.

Grey-faced, Ben turned sideways and heaved his breakfast into the sea. Peter ignored the wretched display. He stepped on the dry sand, and crouched there, his tears mixing with the blood splattered spray that covered Trevor's face.

'His hand,' Ben gasped.

Peter looked down. Trevor's fingers were twined into a head of hair. Black curly hair. Wide open blue eyes, parted lips, white face, clean cut at the neck. A human head.

'Tim Sherringham had black curly hair and blue eyes,' Peter observed. 'We never did find his body.'

'Daisy, wake up.'

She was lying on the sofa in Richard's living room and Richard was standing next to her.

'Alan Cummins just telephoned. The hospital's been alerted to an emergency. The police have sealed off the area around the pier.' He didn't tell her that Alan had also said that the officer who called told them that they'd found a head that could be Tim's.

'I'm going to meet Alan at the pier. I'll leave you with Joanna.'

'I'm going with you.' She leapt up from the sofa and searched frenziedly through her handbag for her car keys.

He didn't argue with her. 'I'll drive.' He looked at Joanna.

She looked back at him, white-faced, drained. 'I'll wait here.'

'I want the bridging boards brought up now. On the double.' Mulcahy shouted.



‘Yes, sir,’ a constable answered.

‘Four armed men inside the wire, covering the ladder. Get the boat that’s tied to the pier leg outside the wire perimeter, and circle the area with our own craft. Have you alerted the dog handlers?’ Mulcahy demanded.

‘Constable Pitson saw to it ten minutes ago.’

‘You know the objective. That clown has to be brought out of the pier. Preferably without killing or maiming anyone else. And perhaps we can do it in the next hour or so. We don’t want to be here all bloody week.’ Mulcahy watched the constable jog off the beach and back to the pub. He skirted the spot where, head bowed, Collins crouched over a white-sheeted stretcher. A thickset, ginger-haired doctor was supervising a paramedic who was rigging up a drip.

What were they waiting for? Trevor was badly injured. Surely it made sense to get him into the hospital as quickly as possible. Steeling himself, Mulcahy joined Peter.

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Are you?’ Peter questioned. ‘Are you really bloody sorry?’

‘You can’t help here, go back to the pub,’ Mulcahy shuffled awkwardly, conscious of the attention focused on them. ‘Have a brandy, there’s a good lad.’

‘We’re all good lads when there’s dirty work to be done, aren’t we, Bill? Him,’ he pointed at Trevor, ‘Harries, me, we’re all good lads. And we’ll all end up in the sodding graveyard before our time. How many more, Bill? How many more?’

‘You’re upset. Go to the pub, get yourself a brandy.’

‘I’m not moving from this spot until Trevor leaves,’ Peter asserted vehemently. ‘And then I’m going in there –’ he pointed at the pier. ‘To get the bastard who did this.’

One of the men Trevor and Peter collectively referred to as “Upstairs” joined them. ‘We’re all very upset about Sergeant Joseph, Sergeant – Sergeant –’

‘Collins, sir,’ Mulcahy chipped in.

‘Of course – Sergeant Collins. But shouting isn’t going to help. I sympathise with you, I really do. Lost a colleague myself some years back under similar circumstances...’

‘Trevor’s not dead yet.’

He thumped Peter on the shoulder. ‘As of now, I’m relieving you from duty.’

Peter turned savagely on the senior officer. ‘I’ve done what you lot have been telling me to do for years. And look where it’s got me, and him,’ he pointed at Trevor. ‘He might be just one more bloody sergeant to you, but he was my friend – and...’

‘Sir?’ A young constable ran towards them. ‘People behind our cordon say they’re doctors and can help whoever’s injured.’

‘Tell them to wait.’ Mulcahy looked at Peter. ‘When the ambulance leaves for the hospital, go with it.’

‘I saw the stretcher.’ Daisy ran towards them. When she saw Peter she stopped.

‘I tried to stop her,’ a constable and Richard Sherringham appeared behind her.

‘Daisy,’ Alan called to her from the stretcher, where he was fighting to keep alive the flicker of life that still burned in Trevor.

Peter stared at her through narrow embittered eyes. ‘He loved you. Worshipped the ground you walked on. And you can’t spare him a tear. Well, if you won’t cry for him,’ Peter picked up a bundle that lay on the ground beside Trevor, and threw off the plastic sheeting that covered it. ‘Maybe you’ll cry for this.’ He thrust the decapitated head, towards her.

Horror-struck, Daisy remained silent for only a moment. Then hysteria set in.

‘In God’s name, Collins,’ Mulcahy grabbed the head, but he didn’t succeed in covering it before Alan Cummins and Richard saw it. ‘I’m sorry you had to see your husband’s head this way,’ Mulcahy apologised to Daisy. She didn’t hear him. She was sobbing into Alan’s shoulder.

‘That isn’t Tim Sherringham,’ Alan struggled to get the words out. The head wasn’t Tim’s, but he’d known the man it had belonged to. Laughed with him, worked with him, drunk with him. Liked him even.

‘It fits Sherringham’s description,’ Peter insisted.

‘It is, or rather was, Tony Pierce.’

‘The doctor who went to Arabia?’ Peter asked.

Alan nodded agreement.

‘That’s right,’ he reeled as the full horror of what he’d seen sank in. ‘He went to Arabia.’

## Chapter Twenty-One

MULCAHY STOOD BACK AND watched the ambulance drive away. From start to finish this whole affair had been a shambles – a shambles that had cost the life of one good man in Harries, and now probably Joseph. And Joseph would be near impossible to replace, not least for the tempering effect he had on Collins's irrational behaviour. Who else could he get to work with Collins?

'Sir, the bridging boards have arrived, and armed officers are in position inside the wire.'

'Thank you, constable.' It wasn't finished yet. He had to pick the lucky man who would climb on to the pier and bring out the murdering lunatic holed up in there. He looked along the beach. The ambulance was driving slowly down the road, and the men were locked in a respectful silence for Joseph. Even Peter – Peter who had refused to go with the ambulance. He wanted to reach out, offer him something. He gripped Peter's arm.

'How about pretending we didn't hear the brass relieving you from duty and you and me signing gun chits and going up on the pier?'

'That's fine by me.' Peter's voice was rough with suppressed emotion.

'Sir.'

'What now?' Mulcahy demanded irritably of the young constable.

'Sergeant Scott told me to tell you we couldn't stop him.'

'Stop who from doing what?'

‘Dr Richard Sherringham, sir. He broke through the cordon, climbed around the barbed wire and up the ladder. He’s on the pier.’

Mulcahy glared furiously at the nervous constable. ‘Why can’t any of you lot do the job you were asked to do?’

‘Sorry, sir.’

‘Your bloody incompetence has given us exactly what we need. A stupid bungling amateur fumbling around a murdering madman –’

‘He can’t do any worse than we have,’ Peter interrupted.

‘The dog handlers arrived yet?’ Mulcahy asked the constable.

‘Not that I’ve seen.’

‘Go check. And tell Sergeant Scott he’d better try harder from now on.’

Peter took off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He wrung the excess water from the bottom of his trousers and called Ben over. ‘Your dogs?’

Ben understood Peter at once. ‘They’re as good as army trained,’ he boasted. ‘If you shout “attack and hold,” they’ll do just that. And that’s what you’ll need up there.’ He jabbed his pale, fat forefinger in the direction of the pier.

‘Climb a ladder?’

‘Never tried. But if you drive them I don’t see why not.’

‘Worth a try?’ Peter asked Bill.

‘I’ll get the guns,’ he replied briskly.

‘Sergeant Collins, about Constable Harries –’ Sarah Merchant waylaid Peter as he checked the gun he’d drawn.

Feeling like a coward, he said, ‘I’m a little busy right now, could we talk later?’

‘Yes, sir.’ Undeterred, she voiced the suspicions that had been tormenting her since early morning. ‘Something’s happened to him, hasn’t it? If he’d been all right he would have telephoned me in the last twenty-four hours, I’m sure of it.’

Peter’s initial reaction was to hand her the usual platitudes but the sun chose that moment to disappear behind a bank of cloud. The brilliant, sun-dipped beach scene faded to a colour-bled shade of grey. The sea turned pewter, the temperature dropped, and he shivered in his damp clothes.

‘We’ve all had more than our fair share of misery in the last twenty-four hours, Constable.’

‘Yes, sir.’ She swallowed a tear. ‘I’m sorry about Sergeant Joseph, sir.’

‘Constable Merchant, do you see that lady up there?’ He pointed to the promenade where Daisy sat huddled under a blanket that someone had thrown around her shoulders. ‘See if you can do anything for her.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘If I could turn the clock back, Constable Merchant, I would,’ he called after her.

Bill strode purposefully towards him.

‘The boys have cut through the barricades at the front end of the pier. We’ll give them a couple of minutes to push across the bridging planks. If he’s at the land end, they’ll flush him down for us.’

‘And we go up the ladder, and corner him in the theatre?’

‘That’s the idea.’

‘Richard Sherringham?’

‘If he’s still alive, try not to shoot him.’

\* \* \*

Daisy took the plastic beaker of hot coffee and cupped her hands round it. 'Thank you,' she said to the young woman who had given it to her.

'Can I get you anything else, Dr Sherringham?'

'No, this is fine.'

'Would you mind if I sat with you?' the policewoman asked.

'I'd be glad of the company.'

The officer sat beside her, self-contained, silent. Daisy was grateful for what she took to be tact. She looked across at the pier. What on earth had possessed Richard to go in there? Did he think Tim was in there? That the kidnappers had left him alive? She only wished she could believe it.

'Up you go. Go on. Up.' Peter lifted the dog's paws on to a rung of the ladder.

'Edna will catch on quicker than Cyril.' Ben caught hold of the second dog by the collar, and waded through the sea towards Peter and Bill.

'Don't come any closer,' Mulcahy warned.

'They're my dogs.' Ben spat the butt end he'd been smoking out of his mouth. 'Here Edna. Up.' The dog got the message. Slowly, after a false start and a few hesitant pauses, the bitch reached the open trapdoor. 'In Edna.' Ben shouted. 'Your turn Cyril.'

'Bloody stupid names for dogs,' Peter observed.

'Bloody stupid names for people,' Ben retorted.

'Right, Mr Gummer, thank you for your help. Now you can step back, behind the wire?' Mulcahy commanded.

'The hell I will. Those are my dogs...'

'Bullets might start flying around, Ben.' Peter patted the gun in his shoulder holster.

'They missed me on National Service.'

‘They might not this time.’ Peter put his foot on the ladder. ‘Go back. Call it a matter of insurance.’

‘As far as the wire, no further,’ Ben conceded.

‘Behind it,’ Mulcahy barked.

‘Second dog in.’ Peter began to climb, quickly and steadily. He looked warily up at the open trapdoor. If anyone flung a knife, or fired a gun down at him he’d be a sitting target, he reflected philosophically, but close encounters of a grappling kind were more the clown’s style. He figured that he had a more than even chance of making it all the way.

He reached the top. Placing his hands firmly either side of the trapdoor housing he swung himself up and on to the pier. The dogs were scratching around an alcove in the wall directly in front of him. There was no sign of Sherringham. He reached for his gun, flicked off the safety catch and rolled tightly into a corner, the seaward wall at his back.

He took his bearings. Noted the position of every item in the room – the ice chest and the generator that would afford some protection if bullets started flying – the bench and oil cans, which might prove useful in a fight – shouldn’t be too difficult, provided the clown had nothing more than a knife. The dogs continued to scratch at the wall.

Bill’s head popped cautiously up through the trapdoor.

‘Clear,’ Peter hissed. Bill rolled alongside him.

Bill gestured with his gun. Peter nodded. They rushed the alcove. One either side. Peter darted out and pushed. The wood gave, but only fractionally. He pushed aside the dogs. ‘Small door, about four foot. Key hole. Open bolts this side,’ he whispered.

‘Shoot the lock,’ Bill ordered.



Peter put the nozzle of his gun into the keyhole, pointed down, fired, and kicked in the door. The dogs bounded through. There were shouts. A cry. Dogs snarling, growling, worrying at something. Holding the gun in front of him, Peter bent double and negotiated the small gap.

Light poured in through the ragged holes in the ceiling and floor. He was on a stage.

‘Call the dogs off,’ Richard Sherringham shrieked.

‘Edna, Cyril, heel.’ Peter ordered sharply. To his amazement they slunk off, crawling behind him.

Richard was crouched over a body on the floor. Peter saw black silk trousers, white pom-poms, silk slippers.

‘Who is it, Sherringham?’ He lifted his gun and sensed Bill moving in behind him. Richard looked up.

‘My brother, Sergeant Collins. My kid brother Tim.’

‘Can you tell us what you found in there?’

‘Is it true there’s a freezer full of heads?’

‘Have you caught the motorway murderer?’

‘Is there a connection between the murders and the Sherringhams?’

‘Why did Dr Sherringham...’

‘Please...’ Mulcahy addressed the gathered press. ‘Press conference in two hours at the station. Until then no comment.’ He slapped his hands over the lens of a camera pushed too close to his face. ‘Two hours at the station,’ he repeated.

Peter passed unnoticed through the tight-knit group of pressmen. Exhausted, he leaned against a police van and closed his eyes.

‘Want some of this?’ A constable, who’d started in the force about the same time as he had, handed him a flask.

‘Thank God for a copper who doesn’t call me, sir.’ Peter took the flask, unscrewed the top and swallowed a mouthful of brandy.

‘Rough in there?’

‘Not as rough as I thought it would be.’ Peter slipped the gun holster from his shoulder. He’d have to turn it in, but it could wait.

‘Watch out, here comes trouble,’ the constable warned.

Peter handed back the flask.

‘Peter,’ Mulcahy said, ‘if you arrest –’

‘I’m not arresting anyone. I’m not doing anything. I’m finished.’

‘You look finished,’ Mulcahy agreed.

‘As of now I’m taking extended leave.’

‘There are loose ends to tie up.’

‘Tie them yourself.’ Peter picked up his jacket from the floor of the van. ‘I’ve things to do.’

‘Such as?’ Mulcahy demanded.

‘Caring for an old friend while I still can.’ Peter walked away. He didn’t look back. He knew that if he did he’d get side-tracked, involved. With Daisy Sherringham, with the slobbering, gibbering maniac he’d help strap into a straitjacket. With finding the villains who’d killed Harries and turned him into mincemeat.

He climbed into his car, started the engine and headed for the hospital. Alive or dead, he’d see Joseph, then he’d make a phone call. One he didn’t want to make. To Axminster.

Daisy sat, fixed, immobile. Only her eyes were alive as she gazed at Tim’s body stretched out on a bed next to her chair.

The past few days had taught her to cherish the times when Tim slept. She’d learned to deceive herself, pretend

normality. He'd had an appendix operation – concussion – collapsed lung – anything but the truth. Anything rather than face the fact that beneath his beautiful, relaxed features insanity raged hideously through his broken mind.

Or did it? Was there something left of the old Tim? A tiny part, nurtured within her, the faint flicker of hope that given sufficient time and care he would recover – supposition and hope, foolish stupid hope. All she had left to cling to. The wild hope that belonged in the realms of fantasy. Tim would wake up. Slowly open his eyes, smile, reach out to her with his hands. Whisper...

“Darling, I’ve had this crazy dream.”

Hope, almost but not quite, as ethereal, that Richard or Joanna would walk into the room with a...

“We’ve identified a treatment.”

‘Daisy?’

She looked up. ‘Richard, I’m sorry, I was miles away.’

He sat in a chair alongside her own. ‘Still no signs of him coming round?’

‘No.’

‘Probably just as well.’

‘We can’t keep him sedated forever.’

A small dry cough from the other side of the room reminded her that they weren’t alone. They were never alone. A few days of living with a police shadow and she’d learned to ignore the presence. Proof that it was possible to get used to almost anything.

‘I’ve come to take you to lunch,’ Richard rose from his chair.

‘I’m not hungry.’

‘Doctor’s orders. If you don’t eat, you’ll collapse, and frankly that’s an added burden I couldn’t cope with right now.’

‘Put like that, how can I refuse?’

The constable nodded to Richard as they left the room. A nurse slid into the chair Daisy had vacated, and silence closed in on the sickroom once more.

‘About bloody time,’ Mulcahy complained. ‘We’d just about given up hope of seeing you again.’

‘Take a good look while you have the chance,’ Peter retorted, ‘because as of ten minutes from now I’m taking three weeks leave I’m owed.’

‘No you’re not,’ Mulcahy blasted. ‘You’re not taking another minute’s leave until this case is closed.’

‘As far as I’m concerned this case is closed. It was closed yesterday.’ Peter threw himself on one of the familiar hard chairs in Bill’s office. Familiar. But wrong. No Trevor sitting opposite. No Harries rushing in and out like an eager puppy. Sitting in the hospital had been a pushover compared with this. For the first time, Harries’ death and Trevor’s absence moved out of their separate, segregated compartments, and bit deep into his daily normal routine. And it hurt. More than he would have believed possible.

‘How’s Trevor?’ Bill cleared his throat in embarrassment, at not having asked right away.

‘He has a machine to do his breathing and eating for him. The doctors are arguing amongst themselves as to whether he’ll ever see, talk or think again,’ Peter said flatly.

‘How are his family taking it?’

‘His mother cries all the time. His brother tries to keep a stiff upper lip. Sometimes he succeeds.’

‘Where are they staying?’

‘In Trevor’s flat. I offered them mine. It’s cleaner, but no better. They prefer to put up with Trevor’s mess.’

‘Anything I can do?’

‘Not unless you’re a miracle worker.’

‘I’ve been meaning to visit him,’ Bill insisted a little too dogmatically. ‘But it’s been like a zoo here. The brass called an end of case conference late yesterday afternoon and it finished at midnight. With the family of a government minister involved...’

‘Trevor’s family don’t know you, and he’s as alert as a cabbage waiting to be picked.’ Tight-lipped, Peter looked across at Bill. ‘I’m not blaming you. Not any more. Harries and Trevor chose to be coppers. They knew the score.’ He pulled a cigar from his top pocket and lit it, remembering, in spite of the sentiments he’d just expressed, the conversation he’d had with Trevor that last morning.

‘For the first time in years I have something on the horizon that’s worth living for. And I’m not risking that. Not for you. Not for your crazy notions of revenge. And certainly not for an investigation that’s going nowhere.’

For Trevor it had certainly gone nowhere, he reflected grimly. And it was his fault. Trevor had been sick. He should have been home resting, not hanging around the Hart waiting for Ben. Then afterwards – on the beach. Peter grimaced when he recalled the way he’d treated Daisy Sherringham. Trevor would have hated him for that. At least Daisy had given Trevor some cause for happiness, which was more than could be said for him.

‘Peter, Trevor wouldn’t want...’

‘No platitudes. What happened – happened. Harries is dead and Trevor is as good as dead and I’m responsible.’

‘That’s crazy.’

Peter drew on his cigar. ‘I didn’t call in for a dose of paternal sympathy. I briefed Harries and sent him out. I took Trevor to the Hart. I’ll have to learn to live with it. All I want to do now is to go home and drink myself into a stupor, but Trevor’s desk has to be cleared and I couldn’t bear the thought of some copper who didn’t know him chucking his things into a box. And, as I’m here, I’m

telling you, purely out of courtesy, that I'm taking all the leave that's owed me. Now that you know, I'm going into the office...'

'Give me twenty-four hours and I'll add a week's leave to whatever you've got coming,' Bill offered.

'No.'

'You're mad to turn down an offer like that.'

'This job doesn't make for sanity.'

'That doesn't say much for the rest of us,' Bill replied evenly.

Peter drew heavily on his cigar. 'Why am I suddenly so important? This place is crawling with "yes boys", ready to jump the moment you click your fingers.'

'You started the case. I need you to finish it.'

'I'm Drug Squad, not Serious Crimes. I never wanted any part of this dirty mess and you were the one who pushed us into it.'

'Steady, Collins.' Mulcahy warned. 'You've always been bloody difficult. Don't turn impossible on me now. Carry on this way and someone will have your stripes.'

'If it's my job you're after you can have it.'

'I don't want your job. We're going to be stretched to the limit over the next couple of days. I thought you'd like to make the formal arrest. Nail the bastards who put Trevor where he is. Tie up the ends.'

'By serving a warrant on Tim Sherringham?' Peter sneered. 'Forget it. Even I felt sorry for the poor bugger once he was strapped into a straitjacket.'

'Not Tim Sherringham.'

Peter became serious. 'Then who?'

'Those two down and outs. Andy...' Mulcahy fumbled at his desk and found the note he was looking for, 'and Gramps.'

'They didn't kill anyone.'

'I've two warrants here that say different.'

‘I take a couple of days off and you have a brainstorm?’

‘It ties in. They had access to the pier through the hole in the wire. They used the place as a base, dressed in the old Pierrot costumes and make-up they found in the theatre.’

‘Forty year old make-up?’ Peter questioned.

‘They saw Tim Sherringham give Sam the cheque in the hostel. They figured he had money and drew up a plan. A bit Hollywood 1930’s, but a plan that almost worked.’

‘Give over. Those two couldn’t organise a piss-up in a brewery.’

‘Together or separately,’ Mulcahy ignored Peter’s remark, ‘they travelled from the pier, by boat, up river to the motorway. Wearing the clown costumes they flagged down Tim Sherringham’s car...’

‘How did they know he’d be travelling along the motorway at that time in the morning?’

‘They made the call that got him out of bed.’

‘And how did they know about the Hawkins case?’

‘They overheard Tim Sherringham and Amanda Dart talking about work when they visited Jubilee Street.’

‘And Tony Pierce?’

‘He was a mistake. They flagged down his car on the same night they flagged down Sherringham’s. He drove along he motorway about an hour earlier. Realising their mistake, they stabbed him to death. Then they dragged his body to the side of the road where they removed his head and hands, which they hid in the old ice chest on the pier. The lab is searching for fingerprints and traces of DNA now, and I’ll bet they’ll belong to those two.’

‘Why keep the head and hands?’

‘Make it difficult for anyone to identify the victim.’

‘You just said Pierce was flagged down by mistake.’

‘And so he was.’

‘You believe, really believe, that those two dog ends of humanity thought all this out, so they could kidnap Sherringham? And after overcoming Tim Sherringham, all six foot six inches of him, and, clutching Pierce’s head and hands, they made off in their victim’s car for a joy ride? Even if I bought it, which I don’t, where are Tony Pierce’s car and the boat now?’

‘Pierce and Sherringham’s cars have been traced to a breaker’s yard in the dock area, so Andy or Gramps must have gone back for whichever car they left first time round.’

‘And Amanda Dart.’

‘They picked her up on the Marina and killed her on Sherringham’s boat.’

‘Two down and outs that anyone in their right mind would cross the street to avoid, persuaded Amanda Dart to go with them to Sherringham’s boat?’

‘They’re insane, but they’re also streetwise. If they weren’t they wouldn’t have lasted this long. Amanda was a nurse. They probably told her Sherringham was sick, that she was needed on board his yacht. We know she was fond of Tim Sherringham, and that he tried to help her find her brother. If she’d thought he was in trouble she would have gone running to him, down and outs or not.’

Collins took a deep breath, it was all so bloody plausible, provided you didn’t know Andy and Gramps the way he did.

‘You still haven’t explained the boat.’

‘One of them drove the victim’s car; the other took the dinghy, rowing boat – whatever, back to the Marina. They probably borrowed it from there in the first place. There are dozens of small craft moored among the larger yachts, and we’re constantly getting calls that one or two have gone missing. They invariably turn up later. Two



down and outs are hardly likely to go out and buy a dinghy.'

'According to you they must have saved their Social Security to buy the petrol for the generator that fed the ice box. And all for the fun of building up a nice little collection of frozen heads. Not much of a motive by any standard.'

'Crazy people don't need motives. Will you arrest them, or not?'

'I'd sooner arrest the real killer. Or Richard Sherringham.'

'Why Richard Sherringham?'

'You did search the old staff quarters in the clinic?'

'We did. The place was clean.'

'Clean? For Christ's sake...'

'We found everything exactly as you described it. Dust – cobwebs –old files...'

'Bins of radioactive waste,' Peter interrupted.

'Bins of radioactive waste,' Mulcahy concurred. 'Holding pellets of spent radium, and tumours removed in surgery. The Home Office pathologist was with us. He went through those bins at considerable personal risk. He found nothing.'

'You confronted Sherringham, showed him Harries' shoe?...'

'How could I? What was I supposed to say? "One of my colleagues broke in here last night. He snooped around your old staff quarters, rummaged in the bins marked "Danger, Radioactive Waste" and came up with this shoe with a transmitter inside.'

'Exactly that.'

'Sherringham didn't even come along to see what we were doing. One of the porters opened up the place for us. That's how important it was to him.'

‘He must have found out I was there. He could have talked to the security guard who let me into the place. He had plenty of time to move out the evidence, replace those bins.’

‘You know we need firm evidence before we can make a move.’

‘Sherringham owns that place.’

‘And at least a hundred people work there. More, if you count the domestic staff.’

‘How many of those have keys to the old staff quarters?’

‘The keys are kept on a board in the head porter’s office.’

‘Including the key to that back room?’

‘Yes. It will take time, Collins, but we’ll get to the bottom of it.’

‘And in the meantime?’

‘In the meantime you arrest Andy and Gramps. Tie up one case before moving on to the next.’

‘They’re connected.’ Collins insisted stubbornly.

‘How?’

‘I wish I knew.’

Mulcahy tossed a couple of plain brown envelopes at him. ‘Warrants for Andy and Gramps’s arrest.’

Collins stared at them for a moment, then picked them up and stowed them away in the inside pocket of his coat. ‘I won’t be able to catch up with Gramps until the hostel opens this evening.’

‘I wasn’t expecting you to.’

‘I don’t know about Andy. He often sleeps rough.’

‘If you don’t find him, someone else will. I’ve had coppers on the lookout for Andy for the past three days.’ Mulcahy left his desk and walked over to the map of the town that was pinned to his wall. ‘You’ll need help. Pick

your own men. Just leave someone capable to cover as Duty Officer.'

'I can cope with mass murderers by myself, thank you. Now if it was a pusher...'

'You've work to do, Collins.'

## Chapter Twenty-Two

‘DAISY, THIS IS PHILLIP Hardwick,’ Richard introduced her to a tall thin man. ‘I believe his reputation speaks for itself.’

‘I’d rather Dr Sherringham made up her own mind about that.’ Hardwick switched off the illuminated board he was using to read a series of scans and offered Daisy his hand.

‘I’ve read some of your papers,’ Daisy peered over his shoulder at the board.

‘Thank you, always flattering to know one’s work is reaching an audience.’ He ushered her towards the button-backed leather chairs that were grouped around the coffee table in the corner of Richard’s office.

Richard opened the drinks cabinet.

‘Brandy?’ he asked.

‘Am I going to need it?’ Daisy enquired nervously. Richard didn’t reply. He poured three measures and carried them over to the table and sat alongside them.

‘Thank you,’ Daisy picked up the glass and wrapped her fingers around the bowl.

‘The first thing you must understand, Dr Sherringham...’

‘Please call me Daisy,’ she interrupted.

He smiled at her, but she recognised the professional detachment in his manner, and shrank from it. ‘Diagnosis is a very personal thing.’

‘Not at your level, Mr Hardwick,’ she observed.

‘So little is known about the brain and its functions, that even we so-called experts know little more than the

African witch doctor who treats his patients according to tradition and superstition. What I am about to tell you about your husband's condition, is no more than my considered opinion.'

She sipped the brandy.

'Initially, I believe the damage to your husband's brain was caused by drugs – probably hallucinogenic,' he slipped into the authoritative tone he employed in the lecture room. 'However, in thirty years of practising medicine I've never seen damage as severe, or as extensive.' He left his chair and walked over to the board. Richard remained seated. Daisy was certain that Richard knew what was coming, but her brother-in-law refused to meet her gaze. Instead he finished his drink, and poured himself another with an unsteady hand. Eyes averted, he held out the bottle to her, but she shook her head and carried her glass from the table, as she went to join Phillip Hardwick.

Phillip switched on the board's lights and sat on the edge of Richard's desk. 'These are the scans I ordered to be taken this morning. Side angles, top and front view of your husband's head,' he sketched out the sequence with his forefinger. 'If you look here, and here, and here,' his finger moved, 'the extent of the damage becomes quite clear. These areas,' he pointed to the blanked-out central parts of Tim's brain, 'show where the cells have been destroyed. However, what I assumed to be drug damage could be cells that were implanted in his brain that did not survive the surgical procedure.'

Daisy clapped her hand across her mouth, 'There's virtually nothing left of his brain.'

'I agree. And what little does remain has shrunk back to the edge of the cranium. Richard wants to try a brain cell transplant, using the techniques that are being pioneered in Mexico as a treatment for Parkinson's.'

‘Would it work?’ she asked.

‘Not in my opinion,’ he looked at Richard not her. ‘The damage is too dramatic, and extensive.’

‘You’re saying that Tim will remain as he is. There’ll be no change in his condition?’

‘No, Dr Sherringham. Unfortunately your husband’s condition is not stable. These scans were taken four hours ago. These,’ he switched on the lights to a second screen, ‘were taken the day your husband was admitted to the clinic. If you compare the two, you can trace the progress of disintegration. The life-support system is not a temporary measure. His respiratory problems have arisen because his brain has ceased to control the involuntary functions of his body. It may be possible to keep him alive on a ventilator. But what you, and Richard, have to face is the fact that you’ll soon be keeping alive a body without even a semblance of a brain.’

‘I still think it’s worth trying a transplant.’ Richard had finished his second brandy and was pouring a third.

Hardwick switched off the lights, and returned to his seat. ‘It’s your clinic; I can’t stop you.’

‘I want you to do it.’

‘You know that a surgeon has to believe in what he’s doing, Richard.’

‘And you wouldn’t.’ Daisy murmured. It wasn’t a question.

‘No, I wouldn’t,’ he replied.

‘Then we’ll find someone else.’ Richard drained his glass. ‘Salen is flying in from Mexico this afternoon. You’ll wait until he gets here?’

‘If you want me to.’ Hardwick put his hand over the top of his brandy glass to stop Richard from refilling it.

\* \* \*

Peter checked the time as he drove through the town. Eight-forty-five. If he went to the hostel this early he would run the risk of being seen by Andy or Gramps or both, and that might put them off the idea of coming in for the night. There were nooks and crannies in the docks known only to the dossers; if they went to ground he wouldn't stand a chance of picking them up that night. But that left him with the problem of what to do for the next hour or so.

He could have a drink. The problem was: where? The Hart was out. He didn't want to set foot in the place again. In fact, thinking about it he didn't want to go anywhere where he'd be recognised. He couldn't face people he knew, no matter how well-intentioned. Not yet.

He drove past the largest hotel in the town. A characterless place, part of a chain that had spawned replicas in every sizeable centre of population across the country. He'd stayed in one of its brother edifices in London. They all had the same fittings and fixtures, the same bland furniture, the same etched glass up-lighters, beech woodwork and beige walls. Wendy had loved what he'd called "the plastic ambience." She'd dragged him into the place on more than one occasion, and he'd never seen anyone in it he'd known. Which was why he turned the wheel of his car and drove into the car park at the back of the building.

Just as he'd hoped, there were only half a dozen cars. Even plastic pubs served their purpose. The main bar was deserted. He rapped on the counter with his knuckles. A young man appeared from the back. He ordered a pint of draught beer, then looked around. A couple of elderly ladies sitting in a corner eyed him warily as they sipped at their port and lemons. He knew the generation; they probably thought themselves little devils for daring to venture into a pub.

‘Slumming, Sergeant Collins?’ Judy Osbourne was wearing dark slacks and a plain grey mohair sweater that hid most of her figure. Her blonde hair was tied back in a severe pony tail, and her face was free from make-up, giving her an oddly youthful appearance, despite the shadows beneath her eyes.

‘Thought I’d see how the other half live.’ He took his drink from the barman and turned to face her.

‘A Campari and soda,’ she informed the barman briskly. ‘In a tall glass, plenty of soda, and a slice of lemon, not orange.’

‘The lady knows what she wants,’ Peter threw a couple of coins on to the counter.

‘I’ll pay for my own drink.’

‘That’s to pay for mine.’ He carried his drink to a table set in the opposite corner to the one occupied by the two ladies. The beer tasted fizzy and antiseptic after the rich tang of the Hart’s real ale. He heard Judy Osbourne talking to the barman, then, to his amazement, she joined him.

‘You’re an out and out bastard; not least of all for what you did to Daisy Sherringham down on the beach the day Tim was found.’

‘Thrusting Tony Pierce’s head at her.’ He nodded agreement. ‘I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have done that.’

‘Alan said you were shocked by what had happened to Trevor Joseph, but then Alan always looks for good in everyone, even bastards like you.’

‘I’ve said I’m sorry. What else do you want me to do?’

‘You can tell me what you’re doing to get the animals who turned Tim Sherringham into a cabbage.’

He kicked a chair out from under the table. ‘Why don’t you sit down?’

‘I don’t want to drink with you.’



‘You wouldn’t be. You’ve bought your own. And I’ve no intention of continuing this conversation until you do sit down. Even the police study basic psychology, Dr Osbourne. You either lower yourself to my level, or leave.’

‘Are you doing anything to put Tim Sherringham’s kidnappers where they belong?’ She set her drink on his table and took the chair he offered.

‘We hope to make arrests shortly.’

‘Are you bullying me?’

‘I wouldn’t dream of it.’

She studied him for a moment. ‘I’m sorry about Trevor Joseph. He at least was human.’

‘He was, and I’m not?’

‘He’s in a mess,’ she ignored his question. ‘I suppose whoever kidnapped Tim, attacked Trevor. It’s strange you didn’t find anyone else on that pier. I can’t understand why Tim didn’t try to escape. The pier was rotten. He could have broken through the boards and climbed down, but if they’d drugged him from the outset...’

‘I can’t discuss a case that’s under investigation.’

‘You haven’t given up on it?’

‘No.’

‘I’ve just come from the Sherringham clinic,’ she revealed. ‘I saw Daisy and Tim.’ ‘How is he?’

‘Severely brain damaged.’

‘Any idea how he got that way?’

‘Your lot have taken enough statements and made enough reports during the past few days to sink a bloody battleship.’

‘I haven’t seen them.’

‘I thought policemen never stopped working,’ she goaded.

‘I’ve been with Trevor’s family. Taking the odd shift at the General so they can rest. They don’t trust the hospital to phone them if anything happens.’

She sat back in her chair and played with her glass. She'd never given Peter Collins credit for having feelings. He was obviously more skilled than most at keeping them hidden.

'The damage to Tim's brain is drug-induced, according to the specialist Richard's brought in,' she revealed. 'As he's the third to come up with that prognosis I suppose it's somewhere near the truth.'

'What kind of drugs?'

'If it means anything, hallucinogenic.'

'It does mean something. I normally work on the Drug Squad.'

'Richard wants to try a brain cell transplant. In Mexico they've been experimenting with surgical implants of brain cells culled from aborted fetuses into patients with brain disease. The idea is to slow down the progression of brain cell disintegration. It's caused an ethical row, but no one can deny that they've made some advances in treatment. Some patients with Parkinson's disease have responded favourably – short term. The transplants have not only taken, but it's claimed that they have stimulated the production of new cells. It's hoped that sufferers from Alzheimer's and dementia can be helped. The damage to Tim's brain is similar to that caused by Alzheimer's.'

Peter recalled the tissue typing mark on Robin Dart's arm. Daisy Sherringham's voice, loaded with sarcasm, "Brain transplants, Sergeant Collins, are still in the realms of fiction".

A down and out disappearing without trace. Harries cut up into so many small pieces, it was anyone's guess how much of him remained and what – if any – parts of his body had been taken. Amanda Dart's, and Tony Pierce's heads stored in the ice box on the old pier.

‘... it’s so cruel,’ Judy Osbourne interrupted his train of thought. ‘Richard’s had to put up with so much. His father committed suicide, now this business with Tim.’

‘Sherringham’s father killed himself?’

‘I don’t know the details, only that there was a scandal that forced Richard to close down his father’s hospital and research projects in America, and set up over here. Richard’s never mentioned it to me, but you know what the medical world is like for rumours.’

Peter didn’t know, but what he did know was that for the first time the removal of the victims’ heads began to make sense.

‘What was this research project of Sherringham’s father?’

‘I don’t know,’ she finished her drink. ‘I came here to get away from medical talk. What’s left of Tim Sherringham is a mess. Daisy’s devastated. She’s trying to put a brave face on it, but she’s failing, dismally. I know it’s a vicious thing to say, but it would have been better if they’d killed Tim outright, rather than leave the mindless husk that Daisy and Richard are trying to cope with.’

‘There’s no hope that he’ll recover?’

‘The experts are arguing over that one. I’m only a simple houseman.’

‘You’re a doctor.’

‘A very junior one.’

‘But you have an opinion.’

‘For what it’s worth, I’ve already told you what I think. I’m on duty in half an hour.’ She left her seat. ‘Goodbye, Sergeant Collins. I sincerely hope I don’t see you again.’

‘That, Dr Osbourne, is very unlikely.’

She walked out of the bar. He forgot about her and the arrests he was supposed to be making in the hostel in half an hour, and concentrated on the information he’d gleaned.

He had to find out more about Sherringham's father, and there was one person who could help him there. A reporter, who had access to newspaper archives, and what was even more important, owed him a favour or two.

Peter walked into the hostel kitchen where Sam Mayberry was doling out trays of tea to the volunteers who were carrying them into the sitting room.

'Andy and Gramps?' Peter asked.

'Gramps hasn't come in, but Andy's upstairs in the front bedroom. Peter, this is the first night we've seen him in weeks. Do you have to talk to him now? You know what he is. He could get upset, and then he'll leave. The man's sick and hungry, he needs to be here.'

'I'll try not to upset him, Sam. Perhaps it would be better if you came with me.'

'What will you be wanting him for?'

'Talk, Sam, that's all. Just talk.' Peter followed Sam up the stairs. He was blasted by a current of heat-laden air as Sam opened the door to the dormitory. It was crowded. Twelve narrow beds were packed into a space barely large enough for four. There was a strong smell of unwashed clothes and sweat. He saw Andy lying half asleep on a bed next to a window glued shut by layers of old paint.

Peter stepped back and allowed Sam to go in alone. Sam spoke gently, quietly to Andy. After a few moments, Andy followed Sam meekly out of the door.

'Mister, what do you want me for, Mister?' Andy spoke in the obsequious grating tone that invariably set Peter's teeth on edge.

'I want to talk to you for a few minutes Andy. That's all,' Peter replied softly.

'Let's go into the kitchen,' Sam suggested. 'I'll put the kettle on, and brew a fresh pot of tea.' Sam led the way downstairs. He lifted the kettle from the rusted gas stove to

the chipped sink and filled it with water. Peter hauled a rickety chair out from under the table and placed it carefully in front of the door. He'd learned his lesson from his last visit. He waited until Andy was in the room, before closing the door, and sitting with his back to it. This time Andy wouldn't escape.

'What do you want me for, Mister?' Andy whined. 'I didn't do nothing. I tried to help the other Mister. Honest I did. It wasn't my fault he wouldn't move. It wasn't my fault. It was the clown that did it. The clown, Mister. He did it all. And you took the clown. I saw you take him.'

'Why did you run off, Andy? We wanted to talk to you. We looked for you afterwards.'

'You were angry, Mister. You're angry with me now. And I didn't do nothing. Not me.'

'I want you to tell me about the clowns, Andy.' Peter pulled a few coins out of his pocket and laid them on the table. 'You can have that in the morning. The Father will look after it for you.'

Andy looked to Sam.

'I'll take care of it, I promise, Andy.' Sam checked the amount and pocketed the money.

'How many clowns were there, Andy?' Peter asked.

Andy looked from Peter to Sam, realising that his only exit was blocked, he answered. 'Lots, Mister. The big one you took away. He was there for a long time. He hurt the other one. The one that fell into the water with a splash. I was there. I saw it.'

Peter remembered the food parcel. Had someone taken food to Sherringham? He held back and waited for Andy to continue.

'I hated the other one, Mister. It hissed and stamped at me. Once it chased me. I fell. I hurt myself.' Andy clutched at his arms and sang in a crooning voice. 'I hate it. It hurt me. I hate it. It hurt me...'

‘Here you are, Andy, a nice cup of tea with lots of milk and sugar, just the way you like it.’ Sam placed the mug in front of him. ‘Would you be having one with us, Peter?’

‘No thank you, Sam.’

Andy grabbed greedily at his tea, eyeing Peter over the rim of the cup as he gulped it.

‘The pier was kept locked Andy. Tell me, how did you get in and out.’

A sly, cunning look stole into Andy’s eyes. ‘I climbed up. There are holes in the floor. Big holes. If you cling to the poles you can slide along, Mister. All it takes is time. Watch, be careful, don’t trust the wood. The wood cracks and breaks, but not the poles. The poles are strong. But always have to watch the holes. And the sea. The sea’s a long way down. Have to be careful, Mister. Bodies fall. Bodies fall down deep. They don’t come up no more.’

‘And you saw a body fall?’

‘Lots, Mister. Fall a long, long way down. Hit the waves, there was a big splash. The water hit me, but no one saw. No one saw. Not even the tall clown who threw down the clown with the keys.’

‘The clown who fell? He had keys?’

‘Keys to unlock the door. He had keys.’

‘You saw a lot, Andy.’

‘Saw a lot, but no one saw Andy. I’m too clever to let anyone see Andy.’

‘This other clown. The one you hate. When did this other clown come?’

‘In the night. With keys. It kept the big one locked in. Andy saw. Andy heard the howling. The tall clown howled. Howled like a dog.’ Andy’s eyes glistened, two glowing coals in the yellow light of the dingy kitchen. ‘Beat his head against the door too. But the door wouldn’t move. He couldn’t get out. Not like Andy. The tall clown

wasn't as clever as Andy. He didn't know how to get in and out.'

'How many clowns did you see, Andy?' Peter pressed again.

Andy held up his fingers. 'One – two –' he said slowly. 'But one went into the water with a big splash. And the tall clown. You took the tall clown away. The tall clown was bad. He hurt the other one, Mister. Andy saw. And he hurt the other Mister. Andy tried to mend the Mister's head.'

Peter closed his eyes against the scene on the beach. Andy pushing Trevor's head down on to his chest.

'Trevor? Is he hurt?' Sam asked. When Peter nodded he added, 'I'll pray for him.'

'He's past praying for, Sam,' Peter turned away. 'The doctor thinks he's past recovery.'

'I am sorry, Peter. But he's not past prayers. I'll pray for him tonight. God will take care of him.'

'I wish I could believe that. I really do. Now, I have to get this man to the station.'

'Not me, Mister. You're not taking me away. Not me, Mister.' Andy became agitated.

'You'll be arresting him, Peter. On what charge?' Sam questioned.

'The charge doesn't matter. He won't be inside long.' Peter clamped his hand on Andy's shoulder. 'We'll find you a comfortable cell, with a warm bed and a meal. Fish and chips perhaps? You'd like that, wouldn't you, Andy?'

'You'll hurt me.'

'No one will hurt you. I promise you. All you're going to get is a good night's sleep, and a meal.'

Andy looked at Peter, then at the door. He knew when he was cornered.

‘I’ll go if you find me a bottle, Mister,’ he whispered, his craving for drink making him suddenly brave. ‘I’ll go with you for a bottle.’

‘Then a bottle it is.’ Keeping his hand on Andy’s shoulder, Peter opened the door.



## Chapter Twenty-Three

‘DO YOU KNOW WHAT time it is?’ Bill stomped up to Peter’s desk.

‘Eleven o’clock,’ Peter tossed some papers into a drawer.

‘I sent you out hours ago.’

‘And I told you that I’d have to wait until the hostel closed. If I’d moved in earlier they could have run off.’

‘You brought them both in?’

‘Gramps wasn’t around, only Andy.’

‘Where is he?’

‘In the cells, with a fish and chip takeaway and a bottle of cider.’

‘You’ve charged him?’

‘No.’

‘You gone soft in the head, Collins?’

‘I feel sorry for the poor old bugger. He didn’t kidnap Sherringham. Or murder anyone. If you want to carry on with your farce you can charge him yourself.’ Peter left his desk and walked out of the door of the main office.

‘You knocking off duty now?’ Bill followed him. ‘Because if you are, it’s an early start. Seven o’clock sharp tomorrow.’

‘In that case you’ll forgive me if I take my beauty sleep.’ Peter stopped and leaned against the doorway. ‘Did we get any pathology reports on the heads we found in the ice chest on the pier?’

‘Some reports have come in,’ Bill pointed to his office. ‘I haven’t had time to read them. What do you expect to find?’

‘Nothing much.’ Peter walked into Bill’s room and picked up the files from his in-tray. ‘You don’t mind, do you?’

‘You said you were leaving.’

Peter held up the files. ‘A little light bedtime reading.’

‘Put it back before you check out,’ Bill headed for the canteen. ‘And when you come in tomorrow, make sure you’re in a more co-operative frame of mind.’

Richard Sherringham showered in the bathroom attached to his office in the clinic and changed into clean clothes. His secretary kept in touch with Hare, and between them they ensured the small wardrobe in his office was kept well stocked. Richard hadn’t made a decision, or given a direct order to any of his staff, medical or domestic, in days.

He hadn’t left the clinic since Tim had been brought in. And he didn’t intend to leave now. So much hinged upon tomorrow. The operation had to work. It simply had to. He picked up the notes Salen had left on his desk.

The intercom buzzed. He pressed the button.

‘There’s a Sergeant Collins to see you, Dr Sherringham. He says it’s urgent.’

‘Send him up,’ Richard answered

He waited for footsteps to sound along the corridor outside his office. When they did, he left his seat and opened the door.

‘Dr Sherringham, thank you for seeing me at this hour,’ Peter was cool, professional.

‘I could hardly do anything else, seeing as how you’re already in the building.’

‘May I come in?’

‘It’s late, Sergeant, and I’m tired. I would appreciate you coming to the point.’

‘May I sit down?’ As Peter was already in one of the armchairs grouped around the table the question was superfluous.

‘If you wish,’ Richard muttered ungraciously. ‘The point, Sergeant Collins.’

‘The point, Dr Sherringham, is that you decided to continue your father’s research here, in England after it was outlawed in the States. And several people – innocent people, have died as a result.’

If Richard was shocked or surprised at the allegation, it didn’t register in his expression. He walked over to the drinks cabinet and opened it. ‘Brandy or whisky?’

‘Neither thank you.’

‘You’re on duty?’

‘No. This is an informal call.’

Richard poured himself a brandy, then sat in the chair opposite his. ‘Are you basing this accusation on hard evidence, Sergeant Collins?’

‘The facts are incontestable. What I don’t have is a motive. I was hoping you would supply me with one.’ Peter’s professionalism wavered when he remembered Trevor, and Harries – young, keen, enthusiastic, and proud to be given his first plain clothes assignment. ‘Why did you repeat a series of experiments that cost so many lives twenty years ago? Wasn’t there enough damage done then?’

‘What makes you think my father’s experiments have been repeated, Sergeant Collins?’ Richard asked.

‘A friend of mine dug into his newspaper’s archives at my request. He came up with a twenty-year-old story about a Dr Theodore Sherringham who was researching aberrant behaviour and brain disease. He used convict volunteers who were paid in privileges. They were all lifers, murderers – rapists – paedophiles – no one cared what happened to them, least of all the prison governor. Then Dr

Sherringham switched from convict volunteers to students. A group of twelve were apparently driven insane after a drink and drugs party organised by the man. There were hints that he'd developed a new hallucinogenic drug. One that produced a uniformly bad trip. My friend even discovered a follow-up story that had been written by an investigative reporter ten years later. The reporter had attempted to trace the students who'd been at the party. Apart from three exceptions they were dead. And those three were incarcerated in private psychiatric clinics, their bills paid for by a kind and charitable benefactor who signs his cheques anonymously. Is that where you intend to put your brother Dr Sherringham? Or do you have a room set aside here for your failures?'

Richard took his drink, left his seat and walked over to the fireplace. 'Old newspaper articles hardly constitute evidence, Sergeant Collins.'

'The newspaper article was what I needed to slip everything into place. This case began with the filing of a missing person's report on your brother. We were unaware that you'd fed him hallucinogenic drugs that had turned him into a raving lunatic. And naturally enough, when headless bodies turned up on the motorway we assumed that he'd be one of the victims. Not the perpetrator.'

'Surely to God you can't believe Tim is responsible for the motorway murders?'

'I said he was the perpetrator, not the murderer. You and your father are responsible for the motorway murders and as your father is dead, that leaves you.' Peter pulled a cigar from the inside pocket of his anorak. 'Do you mind if I smoke?'

Richard shook his head.

'It was very clever of you to organise two killings. We were looking for a deranged serial murderer not a killer who had carefully selected his victims. Tony Pierce

was driving home from a party at your house. He'd stayed behind to play billiards until four in the morning. You knew the make, model and number of his car. The time he left your house and the direction he was taking. Enough to forecast where he'd be at a given time, plus or minus a few minutes. All you had to do was prime your brother to waylay him. I worked out the how, but not the why. Then earlier this evening I ran into Judy Osbourne in a pub. She told me about the brain cell transplant scheduled for your brother tomorrow morning. She answered the question that every copper on the case had been asking. Heads? Why would anyone cut the heads and hands off a body?

'I would have thought that was obvious. It's difficult to identify a body without hands or a head.'

'Only until we can match the body's DNA to a missing person. And we found those particular heads stored in a freezer. An ice box on a deserted pier that was kept running at the cost of a great deal of time and trouble. Again, I asked myself why. Why would anyone take petrol to a deserted pier to keep a generator running in order to keep human heads fresh in an ice box? The murderer could have dumped the heads easily enough. He used a boat to gain access to the pier. If he'd wished to dispose of the heads, he could have sailed that bit further out into the bay, weighted them and dropped them to the sea bed. No one would have been any the wiser. Then tonight I read the pathologist's report on Tony Pierce's head. If he hadn't been murdered he would have soon been in an asylum. He was suffering from brain decay. Senile dementia. The same disease Judy Osbourne told me your brother's suffering from. The pathologist also noted that Tony Pierce had been subjected to a recent brain operation. A small circle had been surgically removed from his cranium, and something had been introduced into the area affected by the disease.

He found evidence of decaying cells, and a mass of dead foreign tissue.'

Peter noticed that Richard was gripping the stem of his glass tightly but he continued to listen silently.

'There was one other head in that ice box. It was also minus sections of brain tissue.'

'Removed, no doubt, in the clinically sterile atmosphere of the old pier,' Richard mocked. 'Whoever tampered with those heads was a maniac.'

'A maniac you created. You wanted Tony Pierce's head for analysis. By studying the mistakes you made during your first operation you hope to avoid repeating them in the second you have planned for your brother tomorrow. Which brings me to the donor tissue you need for that operation. Judy Osbourne told me that foetal brain cells are usually used. I don't know why you didn't use them. Perhaps you couldn't lay your hands on a supply. But what you could lay your hands on was down and outs. People with no homes, no friends or relatives to ask questions if they're wiped off the face of the earth.

'You needed a fit and healthy donor. You ruled out the junkies and hardened dossers, and settled on a young kid. Fit, healthy and no fixed address, and as you thought, no one to miss him when he disappeared – without trace. He told his mate he was going to Saudi Arabia. Where is he now Sherringham? At the bottom of the sea, feeding the fishes?'

'I have no idea what you're talking about.' Richard walked to the window. He opened the blinds and looked out over the sea.

'One of the people you screened as a possible donor was a junkie. You rejected him. Later, unbeknown to you, he disappeared,' Peter's voice continued to fill the room. 'And when he disappeared his sister went down Jubilee Street, accompanied by, of all people, your brother Tim.

The two of them searched the dock area. They met people, asked questions. You found out about it, took fright and eliminated her, not realising she posed no risk to your bloody experiments. You used your brother Tim to kill Tony Pierce. The junkie's sister, Amanda Dart, you either killed yourself, or had your insane brother do it for you. But what you didn't know was the junkie who failed your screening had been in rehab. Like so many other people you've come into contact with he's dead, but before he died, he walked into the police station. He told us about a "medical" he'd had for a job. A medical that included a tissue typing test. He hadn't passed muster. Hardly surprising, he was a junkie. But not your ordinary everyday junkie. He was an actor who'd used heroin by injecting it into the veins at the back of his knees. Three hours after leaving us he was dead. The pathologist cited the cause of death as OD. Mainlining cyanide contaminated heroin through the vein in his arm. A vein he'd never used. And Robin Dart was clean. Had been for months before he died. It didn't add up. You got crude on that one, Sherringham. There's no refinement in using cyanide.' Peter screwed the stub of his cigar out in the onyx ashtray on the coffee table before continuing.

'And your last donor. You picked him up in the day centre in Jubilee Street, but he wasn't a down and out. Stacko was an undercover copper. A young kid on his first plain clothes assignment who ended up as so much mincemeat in one of your bins of radioactive waste. I know because I found him there.' Peter's face was white, strained under the harsh lighting in Richard's office.

'You went through the bins of radioactive waste? Here in the clinic?'

'Your security guard let me in to search for a mythical prowler. I broke into your old staff quarters and combed the place. I have to hand it to you; bins of radioactive

waste make the ideal place to dispose of an unwanted body. I wouldn't have dreamed of looking for Harries there if I hadn't been the one who'd sent him out. But I felt responsible for the boy. What else is in that house? Concealed CCTV, or did your security guard tell you I'd been snooping around?' Peter looked Richard squarely in the eye. 'Aside from the casualties of your bloody experiments, you've engineered the death of one copper and the destruction of another. And I'm arresting you – now.'

'You have no warrant. No evidence other than what on your own admission, you've gathered illegally.'

'I can take you in on suspicion.'

Richard left the window and returned to his chair.

'Your evidence won't stand muster in a court of law, and you know it.' He looked intently at Peter. 'If you leave me here until tomorrow morning, I'll sign a full confession detailing everything. All I'm asking for is a breathing space of a few hours. Once Tim's operation is over I'll come with you.'

Peter remained silent.

'There's a police officer posted at Tim's door in the intensive care unit. Tim's on a life-support system, he's hardly likely to get up and walk out. Why don't you telephone your colleague? Ask him to come up here. He can follow me everywhere I go until you return tomorrow. I give you my word; I will be here in the morning. And I'll have my confession signed and waiting.'

Much as he hated to admit it, Peter knew Sherringham was right. He had very little evidence that would stand up in a court of law. He looked at Richard Sherringham, then he took the telephone he handed him.



## Chapter Twenty-Four

JOANNA DONNED A MASK and gown, and walked past the police guard Richard had insisted on relegating to the outside of Tim's room, and entered the white antiseptic cubicle where Tim lay surrounded by the shining, chromed, high technology apparatus of a life-support system. Daisy was sitting next to him. Gowned and masked, she was holding one of Tim's hands and looking into his face, trying to ignore the machinery linked to his body.

'There's no change?' Joanna asked.

Daisy shook her head.

'If you'd like to take a break, I'll sit with him for a while.'

'Thank you, I'd prefer to stay. I thought I'd never see him again, and now...' Daisy stared intently at her husband. 'I don't want to leave him. Even in this state.'

'He won't remain in this state. Salen's preparing to operate first thing tomorrow.'

'I didn't think it could be organised that quickly.'

'We managed to put together everything that's needed.'

'You found compatible brain tissue?'

'Yes.'

Daisy increased the strength of her grip on Tim's hand, trying to close out an image of foetal brain. Ethics aside, there was so little of Tim's brain left. Even a successful operation – which would be a miracle – carried with it a certainty of personality change. How much of the Tim she knew and loved would remain after tomorrow?

‘Daisy, it will be successful,’ Joanna insisted. ‘I’ve given Salen the notes Tim made six months ago when he carried out similar surgery on Tony Pierce. We have adult brain tissue as close to Tim’s as we can get.’

‘Tim operated on Tony Pierce?’

‘Here in the clinic. He’s a brilliant surgeon, Daisy –’ her voice thinned into silence when she saw Daisy staring at her.

‘I assisted Tim at the operation,’ Joanna walked around the bed. ‘Tony’s condition wasn’t as serious as Tim’s at the time, and the operation was less traumatic. Tim injected the cells into the affected area with a syringe, after removing only a small area of the cranium. But the principle is the same. And Salen has had a great deal more experience than Tim. It’s going to work this time, Daisy. We know so much more.’

‘Have you any idea how Tim got into this state?’ Daisy demanded harshly.

‘Yes.’

‘He was part of some bloody experiment.’

‘Not an experiment. He was finishing the work his father began.’

‘What work?’ Daisy kept her voice low, controlled, but the pressure she was exerting on Tim’s hand increased. Her knuckles whitened, the muscles in her face tensed. ‘What work, Joanna?’ she repeated.

‘Tim and Richard’s father Theo was a great man. A great doctor,’ Joanna revealed emotionally. ‘When he died I kept his papers. I hoped that Richard would continue his work. But Richard didn’t have Theo’s vision. Tim did. When I showed Tim Theo’s research about a year ago, he understood exactly what his father had been striving towards. I’ve worked with Tim now for nearly a year and we’re close to completing what Theo began – Tim –’ Joanna moved closer to the bed. ‘Has to come through

this.' Her voice dropped to a whisper. 'So much depends on his recovery.'

'Tim's work was at the hospital. If he'd been involved in anything else I would have known.'

'You knew only what Tim wanted you to know,' Joanna said cuttingly. 'Tim's work at the General meant nothing to him. You wanted to work for the NHS, not Tim. He lived for the day when he'd be able to publish his and his father's joint findings. He took Theo's notes with him wherever he went. The hospital. Your apartment. You never asked him what he was working on. You never looked to see if it was his patients' notes he was studying so intently. I know because he told me.'

'Tim and I told one another everything. We loved one another,' Daisy countered angrily.

'He might have loved you, but he didn't trust you with the most important thing in his life.' Joanna touched Tim's cheek. 'He's so like his father. He has Theo's mind. Theo's way of working out problems. He has that special quality that can change attitudes, our whole way of thinking, our perception of the world. Call it what you will. Genius, brilliance. Whatever it is, I recognised it in Tim as I did in Theo.'

'Tim's a dedicated doctor. Not a genius. He had to work hard for what he gained. The same as the rest of us.'

'You're forgetting how well I knew Tim. Richard and I brought him up after Theo died. I've always thought of Tim as the son I never had.'

'Tim's too old to be your son,' Daisy said brutally. Tim was hers. No one else's. He needed her now, in his present state more than ever, and she had no intention of abdicating that responsibility. Least of all to Joanna.

'Do you think Tim and I were having an affair?' Joanna mocked. 'It runs far deeper than that Daisy. Much deeper. We were colleagues. We worked together.'

‘You still haven’t told me exactly what work you did.’

‘I’ve given Salen Tim and Theo’s notes. I suppose they’ll be made public now, but not in the way we wanted. We were working on ways to alleviate personality disorders. Give someone a controlled dose of a hallucinogenic drug and hypnotise them out of character and out of aberrant behaviour. It had never been considered a serious proposition until Theo conceived the idea. The early results were promising. Think about it,’ Joanna’s face grew animated, positively glowing with enthusiasm. ‘It is possible to hypnotise people out of character. We did it, and we proved it. Time and again. In the early stages we had government funding and access to long term prisoners in jails across America. Theo re-programmed rapists, and murderers, re-designed their entire personalities. The applications of his theory were limitless. He foresaw a time when prisons would be obsolete. When there’d be no need to lock people up. Simply treat them in a clinic...’

‘Adam...’

‘Precisely, Daisy. Convicted killers like your brother Adam. But then the authorities grew frightened. There were side-effects. So we took the experiments back to the laboratory. Tried the drug and hypnosis combination on volunteers...’

‘Including Tim?’

‘Tim was a child when Theo carried out his experiments. But when he began his own work a year ago, he insisted on actively participating in the experiments. He knew the limits of his own character. Exactly what he was, and was not, capable of doing.’

A horrible suspicion formed in Daisy’s mind. ‘You turned Tim into a murderer. Tim killed Tony Pierce – that girl – he attacked Trevor Joseph...’

‘I turned Tim into nothing. I advised him not to use himself as a guinea pig. His father would never have countenanced the idea. I would have brought in volunteers, but Tim wanted to keep the experiment secret. Apart from Tony Pierce of course. And Tony helped until he became too ill to work. It was the drug that did the damage. It’s difficult to gauge the dosage. Tony was ill, getting worse every day. He needed treatment and that meant finding donor cells. Tony and I set it up, and Tim operated, but it was too late. We tried, we really tried, but Tony’s deterioration accelerated.’

‘So you murdered him.’

‘He was going to Arabia. We couldn’t risk him dying, God knows where, with some foreign pathologist poking and prying into his skull. Tim programmed himself to kill Tony. He made tapes. Took the drug. We set up in my laboratory, and we made use of the old pier. It had the reputation of being haunted and I built on that. I thought no one would investigate reports of Pierrots flitting about there during the night. I knew about the access that my father had left when he’d wired off the place. Then, when Tim didn’t recover from that last hypnosis and the police had taken your boat, I locked him up on the pier. Tried to gain time to reverse the damage, by pretending Tim had been kidnapped. I hoped I could treat Tim myself by using the tapes Tim had made. But the more I tried to re-programme him the worse he became. I didn’t know enough. I searched for, and found a new donor. I had the money Richard had paid to ransom Tim. It was sufficient to buy the services of a competent brain surgeon. I was looking for one I could trust, but in the meantime Tim needed looking after. I took food and drink to him on the pier, but he was deteriorating rapidly. He attacked me. I tried to calm him, keep him there, but he had a knife. He forced me back and I fell...’

‘And that’s how you broke your collar bone?’

‘It was a small price to pay.’

‘It wasn’t small for Tony, that nurse, or Trevor Joseph, or the donors. Where did you get the brain tissue?’

‘Tony knew the risks, Tim told him,’ Joanna replied. ‘Great discoveries have always been made at a price. The others, the donors, they were nothing, down and outs. They had no life, no future. They didn’t matter, Tony and Tim did.’

‘And the nurse?’

‘She cried on Tim’s shoulder. As luck would have it, she worked on the same ward as him. Tim asked us about her brother. I couldn’t even remember him. He tried to smooth things over, help the girl. But she kept asking questions, stirring up trouble. Tim ran into her down the Marina the night after he’d killed Tony. He was ill. He’d had the sense to hide out on your boat, but he was no longer in control of his actions – he was the murderer he’d programmed himself to be.’ Joanna shrugged her shoulders.

Daisy released Tim’s hand. She suddenly felt as if she hadn’t known him. Had never known him.

‘It just happened, Daisy. It wasn’t anyone’s fault. Try to understand. Tim wanted to do so much for society – for people like your brother Adam – for you.’

‘I understand. I understand only too well.’

‘Joanna.’ Richard opened the door and called to her from the corridor.

‘If you should need me for anything. I’ll be here, in the clinic.’ Joanna laid an icy hand on Daisy’s shoulder.

‘Richard needs you,’ she shrank from Joanna’s touch.

Daisy heard the click of the door as Joanna left the room. She looked down at Tim. At the hand she’d been holding. Then the first tear fell from her eyes.

‘My wife and I would appreciate being allowed to sleep in privacy,’ Richard said to the officer who’d dogged his footsteps since Peter Collins had summoned and briefed him.

‘After I’ve taken a look around the room, sir.’ The constable brushed past Richard and walked into the office. He opened all the doors, and checked the small bedroom and bathroom. Then he tried, and failed to open a window.

‘Hermetically sealed,’ Richard explained. ‘The clinic is air-conditioned. And we are twelve floors up.’

Nonplussed by Richard’s impatience, the constable opened the wardrobe. Taking his time, he brushed aside Richard’s clothes, then inspected the boots ranged along the floor of the cupboard. ‘I’ll be outside.’ He pushed the clothes clear of the locks and slammed the wardrobe shut.

‘How thoughtful.’ Joanna threw herself down into one of the chairs.

The officer left. Richard closed the door.

‘Drink?’ Richard opened the cabinet.

‘I would have said you’d had enough.’

‘Joined a temperance society, Joanna?’

‘Make mine a brandy.’

Richard poured the drinks. He carried Joanna’s to the table, left it there and walked to his desk. He unlocked the top drawer with a key he kept on his watch chain. Joanna picked up her drink, leaned back and closed her eyes. She was too preoccupied with her own thoughts to wonder what her husband was doing.

‘What were you discussing with Daisy?’ he asked.

‘I was giving her moral support.’

‘Or your apologies for turning Tim into a cabbage.’

She opened her eyes and saw him holding a gun. Its barrel, long, slim, dark, was pointing at her head.

‘It’s the one my father used to kill himself. Poetic justice, don’t you think?’

‘Richard you don’t understand –’

An explosion of light shattered her consciousness. Her final thoughts were of the brandy. Its wet stickiness soaking through her skirt.

The officer outside the door heard two shots fired in quick succession. He tried the door handle. It failed to give. He depressed the button on his radio and shouted the emergency code. He didn’t wait for a reply. He heaved his shoulder into the door.

The lights in the cubicle flickered from their night-time half strength, to full. Daisy blinked away the effect of the harsh glare. She left her chair and looked through the glass screen to the side of the bed. A nurse was checking the video monitors connected to the CCTV cameras in every cubicle. Another was wheeling in a trolley covered by a cloth.

A few more minutes and they’d be coming to prep Tim. She turned to her husband. He hadn’t moved. He remained the same soulless hulk he’d been yesterday, and the day before...’

‘Daisy.’

‘Alan,’ she tried and failed to smile. ‘I didn’t expect to see you here this morning.’

‘I had nothing better to do.’ He lied badly. The strain of his wakeful night sat heavy on him. Since Peter Collins had called him in the early hours of the morning, he’d made decisions that he was all too conscious, weren’t his to make. But there’d been no one else to call. No one except Daisy. And as he looked at her – and Tim, he realised he’d had no choice. Daisy was barely coping with the misery she knew about. The horror of what Richard had done to himself and Joanna would have broken her in her present frame of mind.



‘Have you been here all night?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘You know it’s almost time?’

‘Yes, I’ve been expecting Richard and Joanna.’

‘They’re not coming. Salen’s ready. Judy’s here with me. We’d like to stay with you while Salen operates.’

‘There’s no need.’

‘Daisy, please. Don’t shut us out. Not now.’

‘Alan. Do something for me?’

‘If I can.’

‘Leave me alone with Tim. Just for a little while longer.’

‘They’ll be here in five minutes.’

‘I know. Would you wait me for me outside?’

‘Judy and I will be in the waiting room.’

‘Thank you.’ She looked down at Tim, seeing him not as he was, but as he’d been the last time they’d stayed with Richard and Joanna. Leaning against the doorway of the bathroom in the bedroom they’d shared, mischief glowing in his deep blue eyes.

‘Shall we shower together?’

‘I’ve just dressed. Joanna’s expecting us downstairs.’

‘Joanna can wait.’

‘Dinner...’

‘Dinner will have to be delayed. I want you. Now.’

‘Not now, later.’

‘Now.’

‘I couldn’t bear the embarrassment.’

‘You hard-hearted creature. Very well, but not too much later. We’ll leave before dessert.’

‘They’ll guess.’

‘That we’re in love? It’s not a crime.’ His strong arms wrapped warmly around her waist, his lips on hers. ‘I’ll

make the excuses. I'll say I have a headache. Don't all new husbands suffer from headaches?'

'You're an idiot.'

'Not for marrying you.'

'Some people might disagree with you.'

'I can't imagine who. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. What did I do with all this love before you came along?'

'Perhaps you gave it to someone else.'

'Never. Only you. There'll only ever be you. And when I'm old and bald, I'll pull on my toupee, put my teeth in, press the button on my electric wheelchair and find you, and kiss you, just as I'm going to now...'

She looked down at the bed. At what was left of him. Then, very slowly, very deliberately, she reached out towards the plug that fed the supply to the life-support system and pulled it from the wall.

When Alan and Judy burst in moments later, they found her staring at Tim. The plug still in her hand.

## Epilogue

AUTUMN WINDS SCoured THE beach, drawing fine patterns across the rain-whipped sands. A grey drizzle merged the grey skies and the grey sea. Only the white frothy tips of the waves crashing on to the beach lightened the brown and pewter tints of the cold, unwelcoming scene.

Peter left the shelter, pushing the newspaper he'd been reading into his pocket. Bill had been right all along. Robin Dart's death had been retribution from a drug dealer. He'd moonlighted for a pusher while he'd been in college. Acted as carrier and distributor. One day he'd got greedy, sold stock that wasn't his to sell, and pocketed the proceeds. He tried to disappear, and didn't get quite far enough.

No wonder Richard Sherringham had stared at him blankly when he'd mentioned Dart's name. The pusher, who'd given Robin Dart his last injection, had been sentenced to twenty years. With good behaviour he'd be back on the streets in eight. Not much to pay for a life.

He walked along the deserted promenade towards the pier. Its gaunt skeleton stood proud no longer. The structure had been stripped naked, its shell plundered. Iron girders lay on the sands, their metallic branches spread upwards into the air. A man-made monster agonising in the indignity of its final death-throes.

Peter watched the blackened silhouettes of men, fighting against the wind and rain, as they loaded the pier, now just so much scrap metal, on to cranes that winched upwards and outwards. A mile or so down the promenade, a line of lorries queued, waiting for their loads.

‘You couldn’t stay away either.’ Daisy Sherringham stood beside him. She was wearing a long black coat and scarf. Her hair was loose, the first time he’d seen it that way, but it was tangled. The wind whipped it around her pale face and dark, smudged eyes.

‘Sticks in your guts, doesn’t it? Never enough money for these damned things until something happens.’

‘You do know Trevor’s going to make it? It will take time...’

‘And you doctors say you hope he’ll be the same. But you don’t know.’

‘We can’t give guarantees. With anyone’s life.’

‘Pity. I’d like a thirty year warranty on mine.’ He hunched his shoulders deeper into his anorak and pulled up the zip until the collar met his chin. ‘I heard you refused to take over the clinic.’

‘The clinic was Richard’s and Joanna’s. I wouldn’t have run it the way they’d have wanted.’

‘A hundred million pounds is a lot of inheritance to turn down.’

She looked him coolly in the eye. ‘The estate belongs to Joanna’s father.’

‘Richard Sherringham’s will was quite specific. Everything to his wife, and on her death Tim. Joanna Sherringham died before Richard. Tim was the last to die.’

‘Only technically. I don’t want to talk about it.’ She turned her back on the pier and walked down the promenade. He walked alongside her.

‘I heard about your promotion.’

‘It’s hardly a promotion. They asked if I’d take over Tim’s job at the hospital until they can appoint a replacement registrar.’

‘I hear they’re not looking very hard.’

‘I’ve already handed in my notice. Hedley’s applied again. Perhaps this time he’ll be lucky.’

‘For the sake of the future of the General, and medicine, I hope not.’

She smiled. ‘He’s not a bad doctor. He just lacks a bedside manner. He really suffered when he was suspended during the enquiry about the work he did for Joanna, finding those young men for her. It’ll be a long time before another doctor at the General moonlights in private practice.’

‘If you’re not staying at the General what are you going to do?’

‘I’m going abroad. They need doctors in Africa. I’ve applied. I don’t know what I want to do with the rest of my life. Not yet. But I do know that I don’t want to stay on here.’

‘You’re going to be missed.’

‘Not for long. The General’s a busy place. People come and go all the time.’ Her grey eyes were misty. He couldn’t tell if it was the rain, or tears.

‘Perhaps we could see each other before you go. Have a drink or something? Gratitude for what you’ve done for Trevor.’

‘Thank you, but no, Sergeant Collins,’ she refused firmly.

‘Probably a wise decision.’

‘Goodbye.’ She held out her hand. He took it.

‘Goodbye, Dr Sherringham.’ He stood by the rail and watched as she walked towards the lights of the town. A shambling figure crossed her path. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out some loose change. He held it in his palm, ready. Then he followed her.

## Katherine John



Katherine John is the daughter of a Prussian refugee and a Welsh father. Born in Pontypridd, she studied English and Sociology at Swansea College, then lived in America and Europe before returning to Wales and a variety of jobs, while indulging her love of writing.

She lives with her family on the Gower Peninsula, near Swansea.

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